A LARK PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK

Portrait Photography

Secrets of Posing & Lighting

Mark Cleghorn

VISIT…

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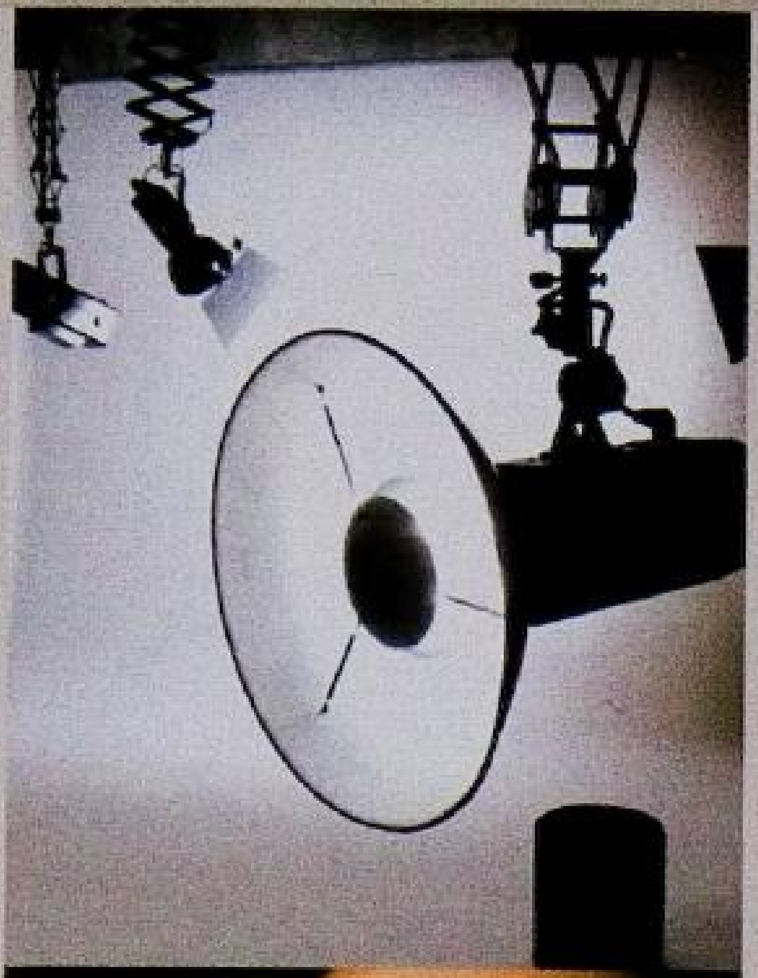
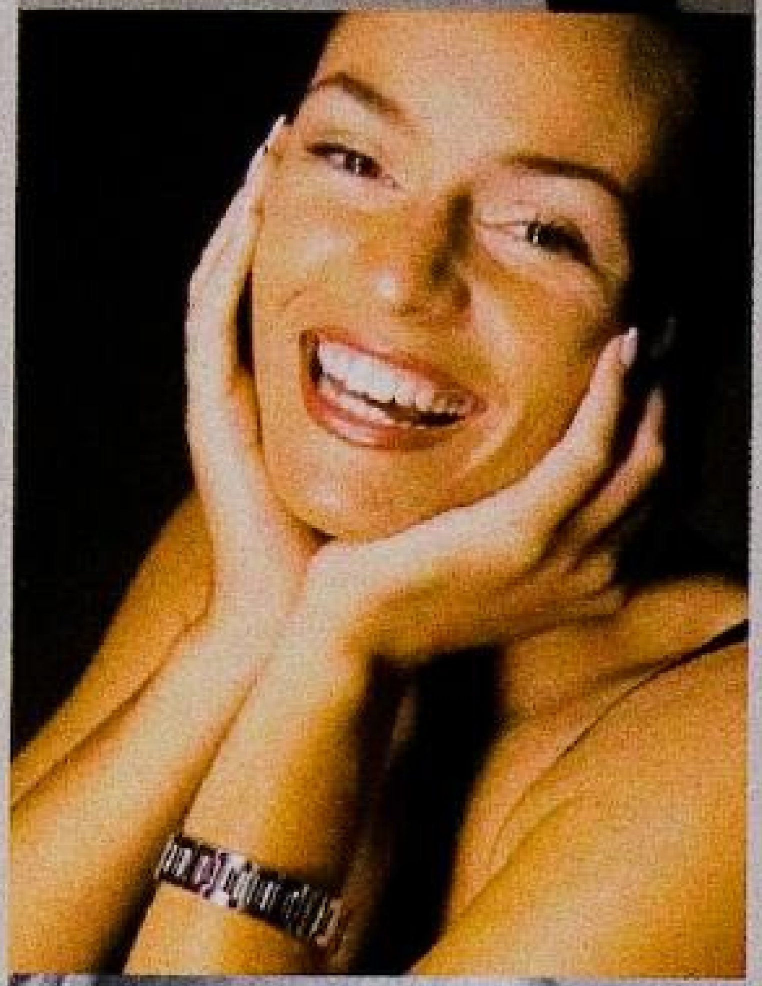
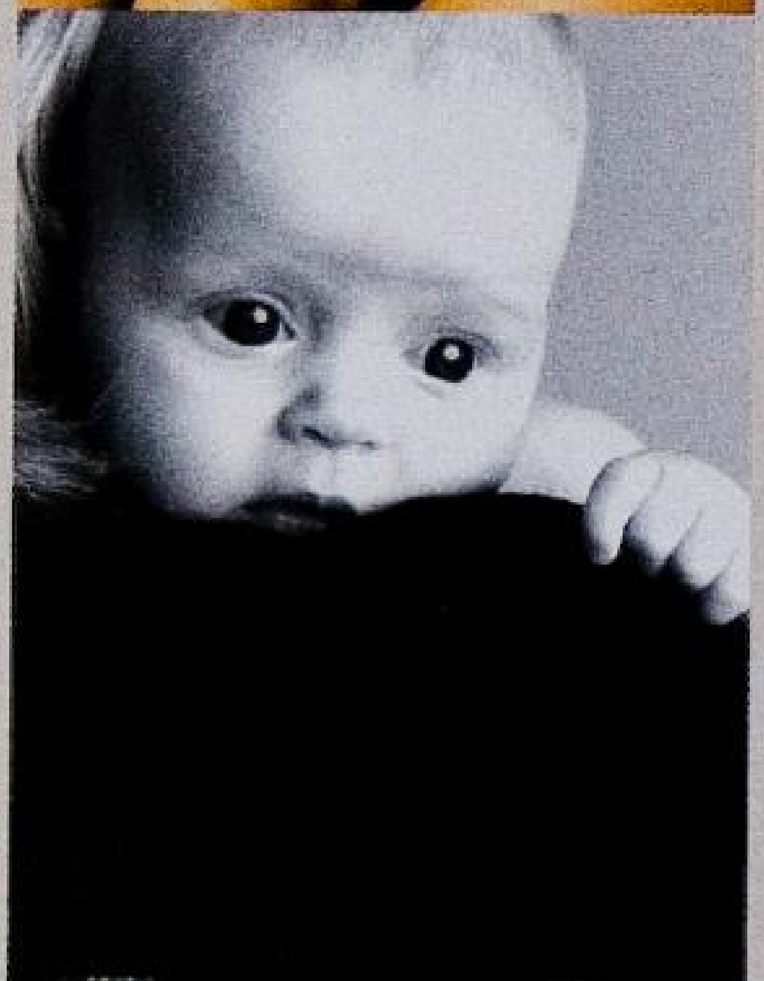
Contents

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The Camera and Lens

Your first major decision is what kind of camera to use, as this will determine how serious a portrait photographer you want to be. There are three main types of camera—compact, single lens reflex (SLR), and medium format. They all do pretty much the same job, but some do it better and easier and with higher quality.

A compact camera basically allows you to "point and shoot." The camera controls most of the technical issues such as exposure and focus—but this very fact limits your creative control as the photographer. If you like candid portraiture and like to be discreet while you are working on location, a compact camera is probably a good starting point.

An SLR camera gives more professional results and, because of its cost, size, and speed of use, is the choice of many professional photographers. You can change lenses for different effects and, because you can override the automation and set things like exposure and aperture yourself, ultimately you have greater creative control. This is now my preferred format, as most manufacturers seem to be using the SLR as their digital base.

A medium-format camera gives a better quality of image because of its size and can only be beaten by a large-format commercial camera. It is, however, both bulky and expensive.

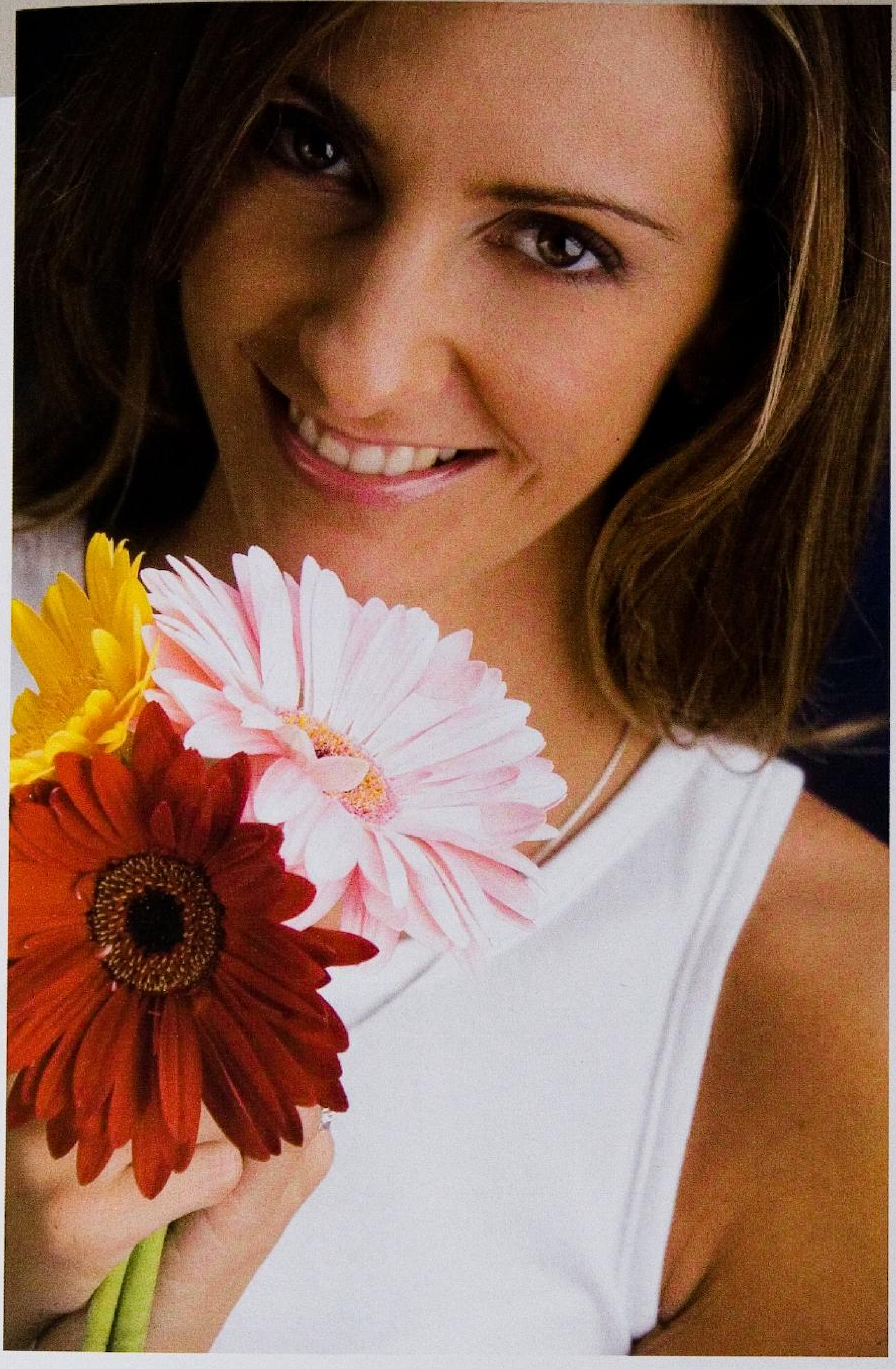
Standard lens
A standard lens is an ideal starting point for portraiture, as it can be used for full- and three-quarter length portraits in small studios.

Film or digital?

Of course, you also have to choose between film-based cameras and digital ones, and there are pros and cons to both. The quality of digital is now equal to that of film when you get to the high-end range of cameras, especially at the 6 million pixel level and above, but to get the best out of the medium you should aim to get the exposure correct at the time of taking the shot, rather than relying on subsequent manipulations. As for film, the variety of film speeds available is the best it has ever been. Digital, of course, allows you to shoot as much as you want during the session at no extra cost and you can instantly see the result on the camera, so you know whether or not you've got the shot you want—unlike film. I've also found that being able to show clients images during a session increases their confidence in me as a photographer; an added bonus is that it's a great way of holding children's interest. But if you already have a good film-based system, don't feel you have to change: film will be around for a long time to come!

Lenses for portraiture

Depending, of course, on how heavily you use it, a good lens should last you ten years or more. The main choice you have to make is between fixed focal length lenses and zooms. Nowadays, the trend seems to be toward zoom lenses, which allow you to change your focal length



rapidly and probably encourage you to experiment more because of the ease with which the shot can be re-composed in camera. I still prefer a fixed lens as I find it makes me work a little harder: I have to move either the subject or the camera to change the shot. The main reason for choosing a fixed lens, however, especially a telephoto, is the compressed perspective that it gives; the sudden fall-off in focus can be used for creative effect.

If you decide to opt for a zoom lens, there are many zooms available for SLRs. A 17–35mm zoom is ideal for shooting large groups in small spaces or for surreal-looking close-ups, because of the distortion it creates. A 28–70mm zoom is a good general lens, as you can use it for wide-angle shots as well as for close-ups. A 70–200mm zoom is ideal if you are working on location, where space is not a problem when shooting full-length portraits, as well as for close-ups.

Telephoto lens
With a telephoto lens, you can shoot close-up portraits with little distortion, as well as shots of subjects who are far away.

Wide-angle lens
Usually used for large groups, or to show more of the location, a wide-angle is also fun for close-ups, as the distortion can be used to creative effect.

The Flash

There are three main types of flash unit on the market. The type you choose will depend on how portable you want the unit to be and how creative you want to be with the light.

Speedlight

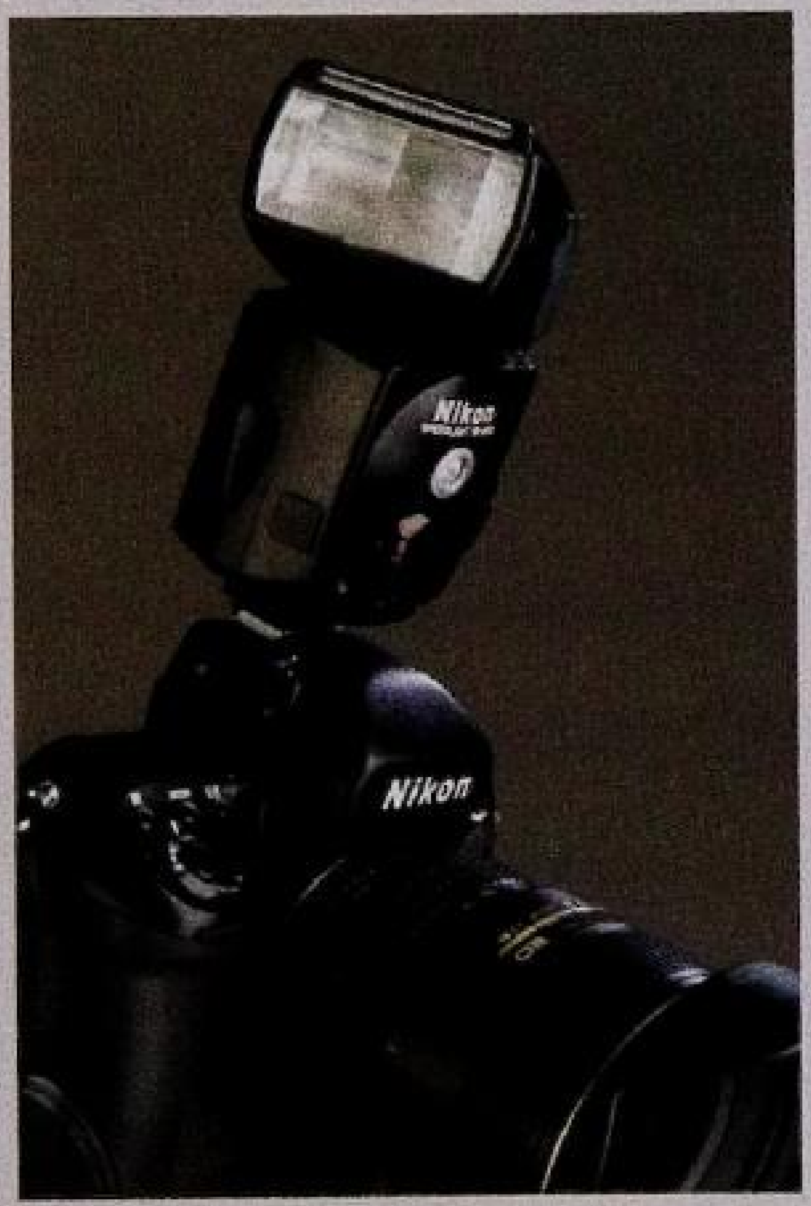
The most commonly used portable flashgun is an on-camera flash, often referred to as a speedlight—a simple but hard-working unit that has limited output because of its small size. A speedlight is ideal if you are working on a low budget or only intend to take reportage-style shots. Its size makes it easily portable, allowing you to shoot almost anywhere, and I always have at least one in my camera bag.

A speedlight can be used on an SLR and even on some compacts as a dedicated flashgun; a dedicated flash gives a more accurate exposure as it measures the flash output on the film plane, avoiding any burning-out of highlights. Most speedlights have a tilt-and-swivel function to change the direction of the flash, enabling you to bounce the light from the flash off walls and ceilings to soften it. Most also come with a little white card that can be attached to the speedlight, which again allows the flash to be softened by bouncing the light back off the surface of the card and onto the subject—an essential facility if you are purchasing a new speedlight. You can also link the speedlight to the camera by means of a remote sync cord, so that you can take it off the camera's hot shoe and position it to one side of your subject to give more modeling.

Hammerhead flash
A hammerhead flash is an inexpensive alternative when many flashes are needed, even though it has limited power output and the battery life is short. A simple portable diffusion box can be used to reduce the specularity and harshness of the light.

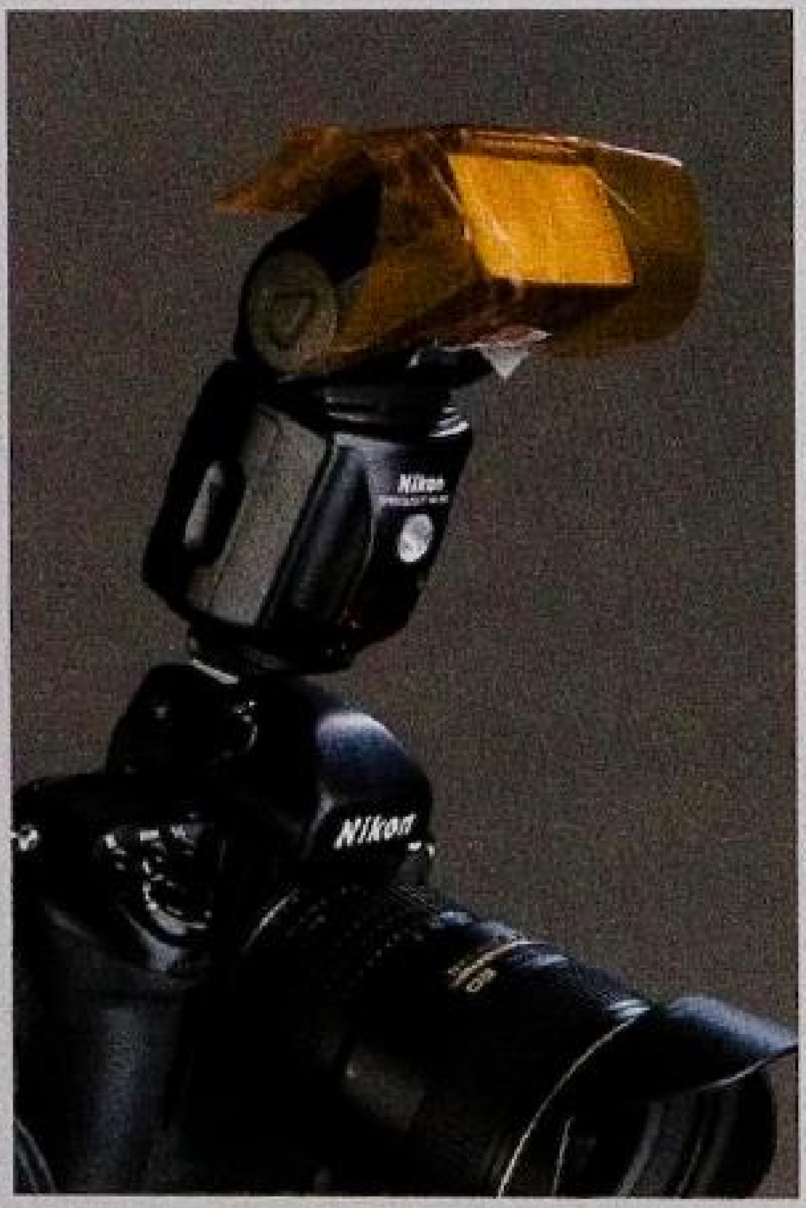
Speedlight features

Although a speedlight is a log-budget flash, a good-quality one has several features that are extremely useful.



Speedlight with angled head
A good-quality speedlight can be angled to bounce to light in different directions: you can point it directly at the subject, rotate it left and right to bounce light off a wall, or angle it upward to bounce light off the ceiling.

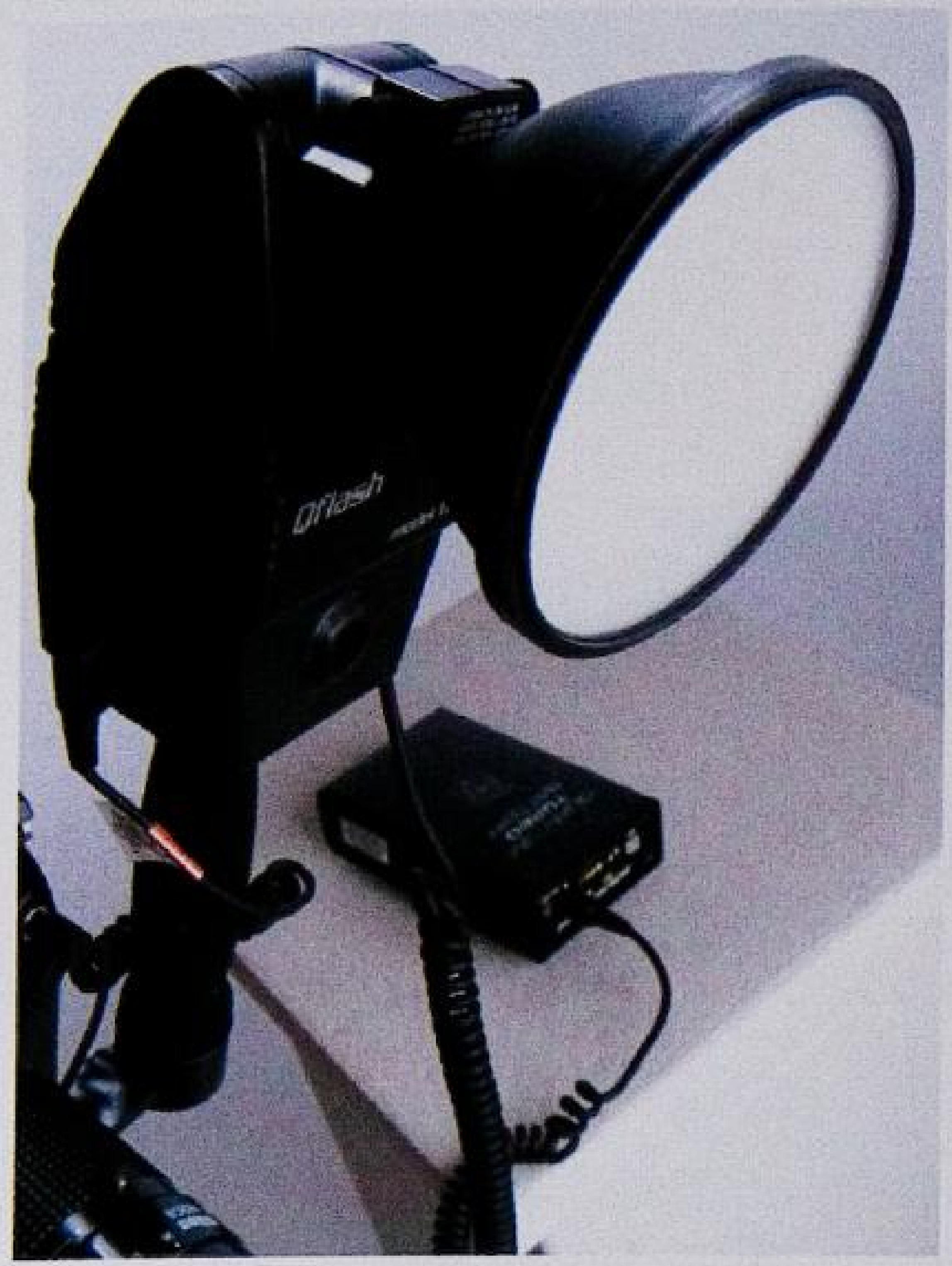
Bounce card
If the speedlight has a bounce card, you can use it as a soft light source; light bounces from the flash onto the card, and from the card onto your subject.



Gels
Gels can be attached to portable flash units to color the subject or background.

Portable flash kit

A portable flash kit is made up of a battery pack and a separate hand flash. The real benefits are the increased power of the flash, adjustable power settings, and (with the more expensive units) the ability to have a modeling bulb facility



Portable flash kit
A portable flash kit is a professional system designed to make any photographer more creative when using flash on location. The size of the battery and flash head make the unit easy to use and carry. This system can run more than one portable flash from the small battery; each of the small flash units has digital readout and computer control.

High-glide system
A high-glide system is an ideal way to keep the studio floor free of clutter. It also allows you to move the heights and position of the flash units within seconds. High-glide systems based on a simple track set-up are available for all sizes of studio. They are expensive, but fantastic value for money in the long term.

Portable flash accessories

Any portable flash can be fitted with either a slave unit or an extension cable, so that you can move the flash away from the camera, as well as with a supplementary battery pack so that it recycles more quickly and lasts longer.

Speedlight plus supplementary battery pack

Quantum flash plus extension cable

that allows you to see and adjust accurately the direction and positioning of the unit. All these things give you greater control than you have with a speedlight. There are many photographers who use only this style of lighting when they are working on location. These portable flash kits made by Quantum can be used just like a studio flash unit as they will accept accessories, allowing you to manipulate the flash very easily— although the range of accessories is limited.

Monobloc head

A monobloc head is less portable than either a speedlight or a Quantum flash kit, as it relies on mains power. Its size, power output, and range of accessories make it the choice of many professional photographers. The monobloc is my preferred choice for portraiture, as it is small enough to use on location at a client's home or workplace, and it also has a very bright modeling bulb. The head can be adjusted accurately to give different flash outputs for different styles of portrait; it also has a quick recycle time, so you don't miss out on "action" shots— particularly useful when you are working with children.

When you are deciding which monobloc unit to buy, always look at the range of accessories that are available.The most powerful monobloc is

Power pack
These systems have all the capabilities of a studio system with the exception of the power limitations. They can actually be run from a car and there some systems that are fully portable.

not necessarily the best one to buy; for most small studios, a monobloc head with an output of 500 watt seconds is perfect. Try and keep all your monobloc heads the same make and power output, as this will allow you to work much faster.

Power pack

A power pack can be used to feed several flash heads or just one. It supplies a large amount of power and is designed to be used mainly in a studio environment. Power-pack systems are built to handle the full range of commercial applications where getting power to a unit is impossible. The advantages of these units are that you can accurately control the output and consistency of power and use a full range of lighting accessories. The disadvantages are that they quickly run out of power and, even though most of the units are compact, they take longer to set up.

Metering flash

You might think that technical advances in in-camera metering mean that a hand-held meter is less important than it once was—but when you are using studio or any portable flash, it is essential in order to get accurate exposures. When a portrait is overexposed, the contrast increases and you lose detail in the highlight and shadow areas, as it brightens whites and blackens blacks. If a portrait is underexposed contrast is reduced, giving a muddy, dull image. Used correctly, a hand-held meter guarantees that you get the most out of the medium, recording information to tenths of a stop and taking any guesswork out of the equation.

To meter accurately, position a hand-held meter as close to the subject as possible, point it toward the light source, and fire the flash. The meter will tell you what aperture to set on the camera for your chosen film speed.

Many people think that the aperture is the most important part of a meter reading; in fact, it is a combination of shutter speed and aperture that gives you fine control. The necessary shutter speed is recorded on the meter and adjusted on the camera to record the ambient light. To eliminate any ambient light, set the shutter speed three stops higher than the ambient meter reading. To prevent any ambient light affecting the flash reading on the meter, set the speed on the meter three stops higher than the ambient reading that you first took.

Measure and set each light independently, using the domed diffuser to allow for an average exposure of highlight and shadow on the subject. For more critical exposures, use a spot meter or meter from an 18 percent gray card, which will give a near-perfect reading.

Light meter
A hand-held meter is an essential tool when getting to grips with studio lighting. It measures both ambient and flash light accurately and has accessories to record spot, incident, and reflective meter readings.

Softening the Light

Very often you will need to soften the light to create a more subtle and flattering portrait. The two most popular methods of doing this are photographic umbrellas (a simple and cost-effective option) and soft boxes.

Umbrellas

Harsh lighting can create a very dramatic-looking portrait, but most people prefer a softer look. A photographic umbrella softens the light at a realistic cost.

An umbrella is generally used to diffuse and reflect the light from the flash back onto the subject. The quality of the light depends on the internal finish of the umbrella; as with reflector panels (see page 20), a silver interior will give a sharper light return, whereas as a gold interior gives a warm light. Better-quality umbrellas have a cover that fits over the exterior; when this outer cover is removed a diffused material is left, allowing you to point the flash and umbrella directly at the subject, giving a contrasty light. The only drawback of an umbrella as a means of softening the light is that it spills light over a broad area.

Soft boxes

A soft box is generally an accessory that you fit on a studio flash, although there are professional units that are a light source in their own right. A soft box produces a very soft light source and is perfect for hiding or disguising imperfections in the skin and facial features. It can be used for individual or group portraits and allows you to emulate many natural lighting subtleties such as light from a window; it can also create a beautiful highlight in the eye, mimicking its shape.

The light in a soft box is diffused through many layers of translucent diffusion material. Because of its proximity to the modeling bulb and the amount of heat that the bulb generates, the diffusion material must be heat resistant.

On all but the cheapest soft boxes, you can adjust the amount of diffusion by removing one or more of the

Types of photographic umbrella

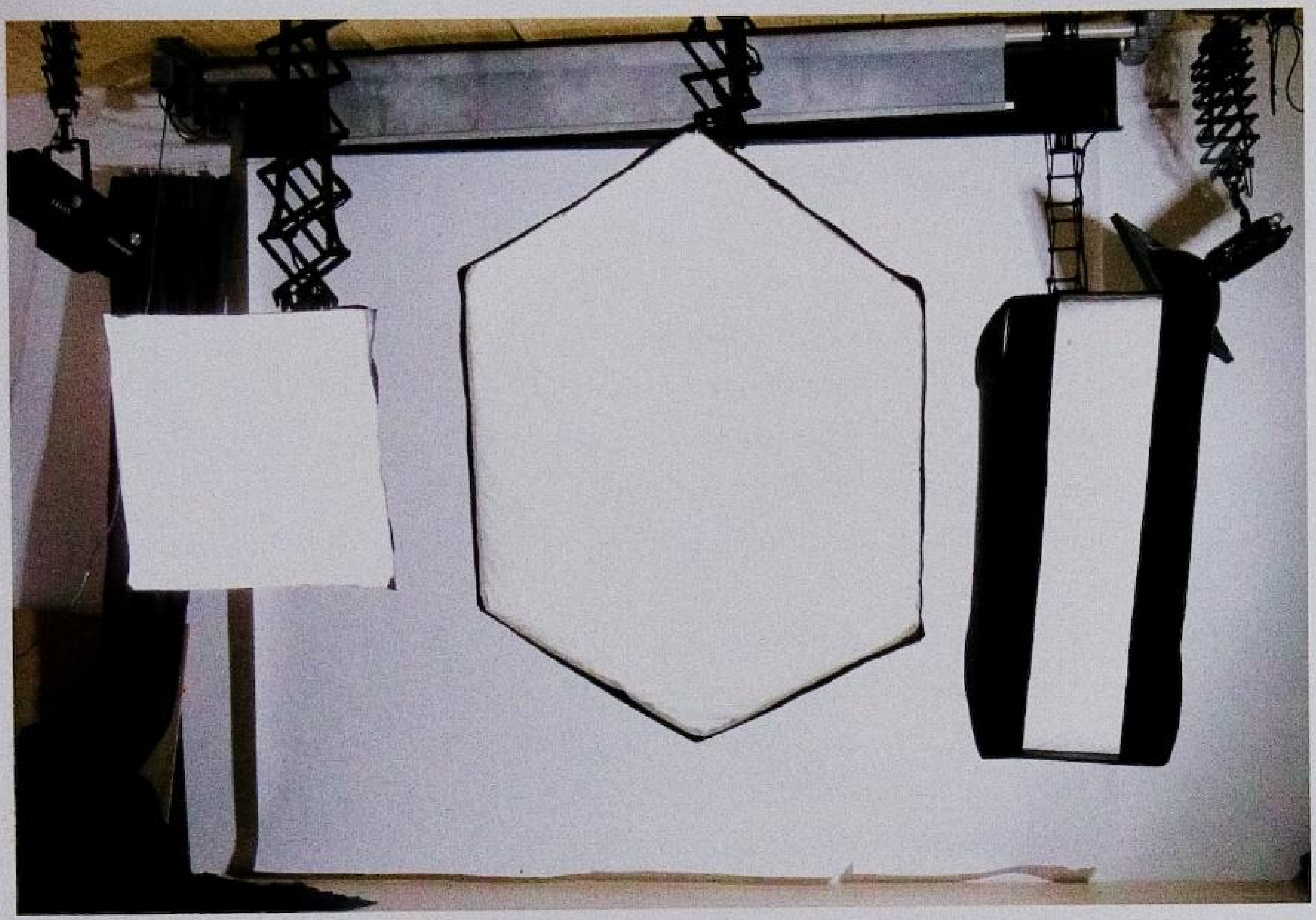
Umrellas offer a low-cost means of softening the light, and there are various types on the market.

Standard umbrella
A standard photographic umbrella has a shiny interior to reflect more of the light

Umbrella interior
Specialist umbrellas have shaped interiors and different internal finishes to maximize the return of light.

Brolly box
A brolly box is acts as a simple soft box; it has an outer diffusion layer to soften the light.

Directional umbrella
A directional umbrella can be turned toward the subject, which creates a more contrasty light.



Shapes and sizes
There are many shapes and sizes of soft box, and each type diffuses the light source in a different way. The most important decision you have to make is which size to buy. From left to right: 24-inch (60-cm) square soft box; hex-oval softbox; strip soft box with outer light shaper removed.

tips

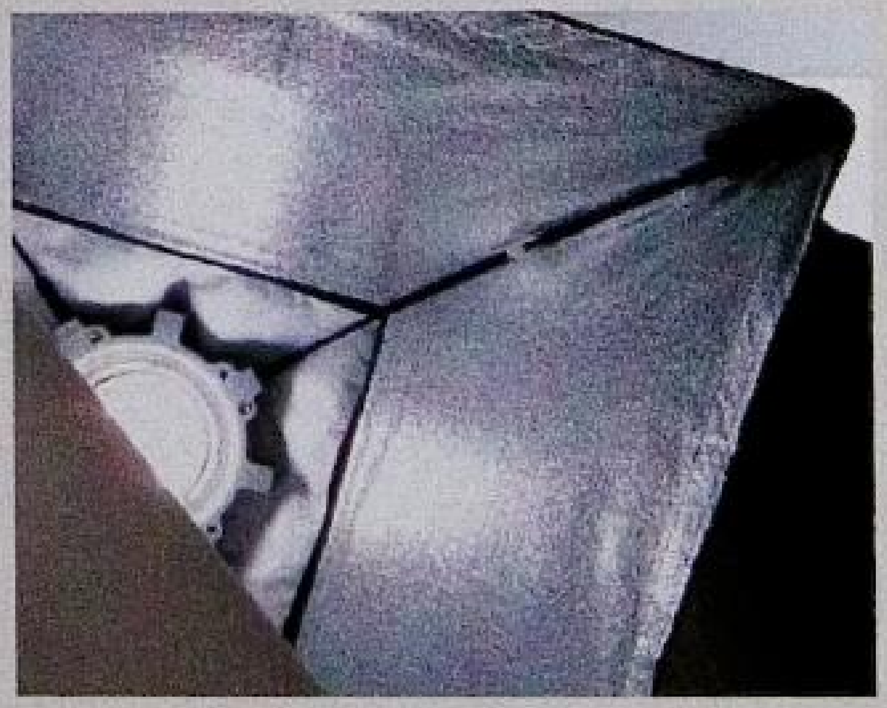
- Use a 24-inch (60-cm) soft box for head-and-shoulder portraits to control light spillage.
- A 40-inch (100-cm) box is a good general-purpose option. It is large enough to illuminate a broad area and small enough to be easily manageable, even if your studio space is limited.
- For large groups as well as for general use, a 70-inch (180-cm) soft box provides a fantastic broad light source.
- You can alter the characteristics of an umbrella to give different warm or cool effects very simply by means of interchangeable linings.

Types of soft box

There are different types of soft box, but for creative control over the amount of light diffusion, it is important to buy one that allows you to remove one or more layers of diffusion material.

Detachable diffusion material
The diffusion material is attached to the frame of the soft box by means of bull clips. You can unhook one or more layers to alter the degree to which the light is diffused.

Strip soft box with detachable outer shaper
This soft box comes with a detachable material which allows you to change the shape of the light to a narrow slit, which is perfect for soft split lighting (see page 56).



No inner diffusion
This box is typical of some small, inexpensive soft boxes, which have only one outer layer of diffusion material and no internal diffusion.

Solid soft box
This soft box is made of solid metal. The flash is diffused through two layers of solid diffusion material printed with a unique dot pattern; this, combined with a further front diffusion screen, gives smooth, perfectly round highlights.

diffusion layers. If you remove the outer diffusion material you increase the sharpness and specularity of the light, which increases the contrast and brightness of the light. When you remove all the diffusion material—both the outer translucent material and the internal heat-resistant layers—you are left with a bare bulb, which can be used to create a harsher light.

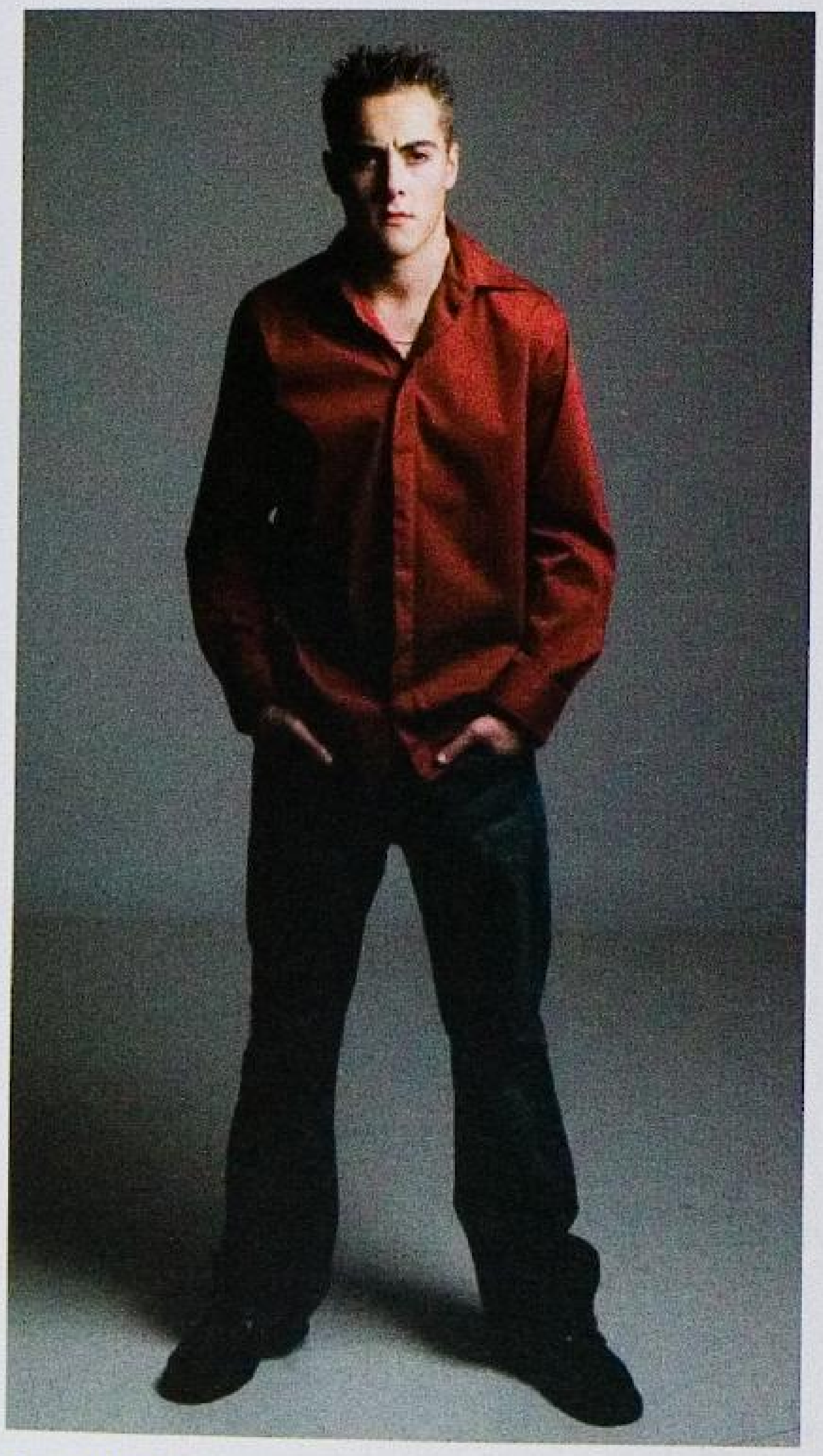
You can control the contrast of the light purely by the direction in which you point the soft box. Aimed directly at the subject, the soft box gives a slightly more contrasty light. Aimed across the subject, it produces a feathered edge and a softer effect, as the edge of the light illuminates the face.

Sizes and shapes of soft boxes

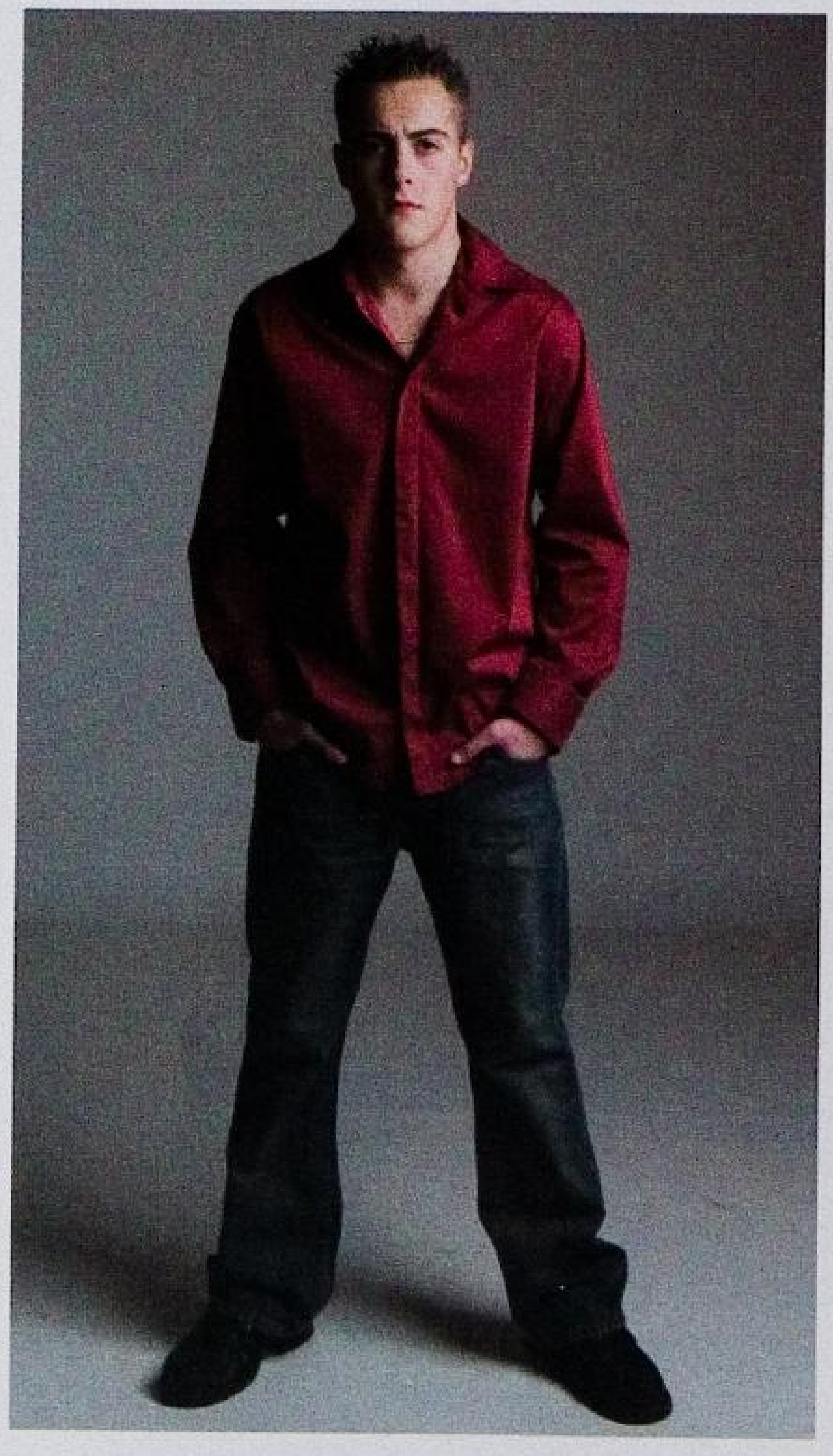
Soft boxes range in size from 16 to 84 inches (40 to 214 cm). A small soft box (24 x 32 inches/60 x 80 cm) is ideal for individual head shots. Although the spread of the light is limited, because of the size of the box, it gives a natural vignette to the light, which can be used creatively with a full-length portrait to darken the body naturally.

A large soft box (54 x 72 inches/138 x 182 cm) can illuminate a larger area, which means that you can illuminate far more than just a head and shoulders—making it ideal for general studio portraiture.

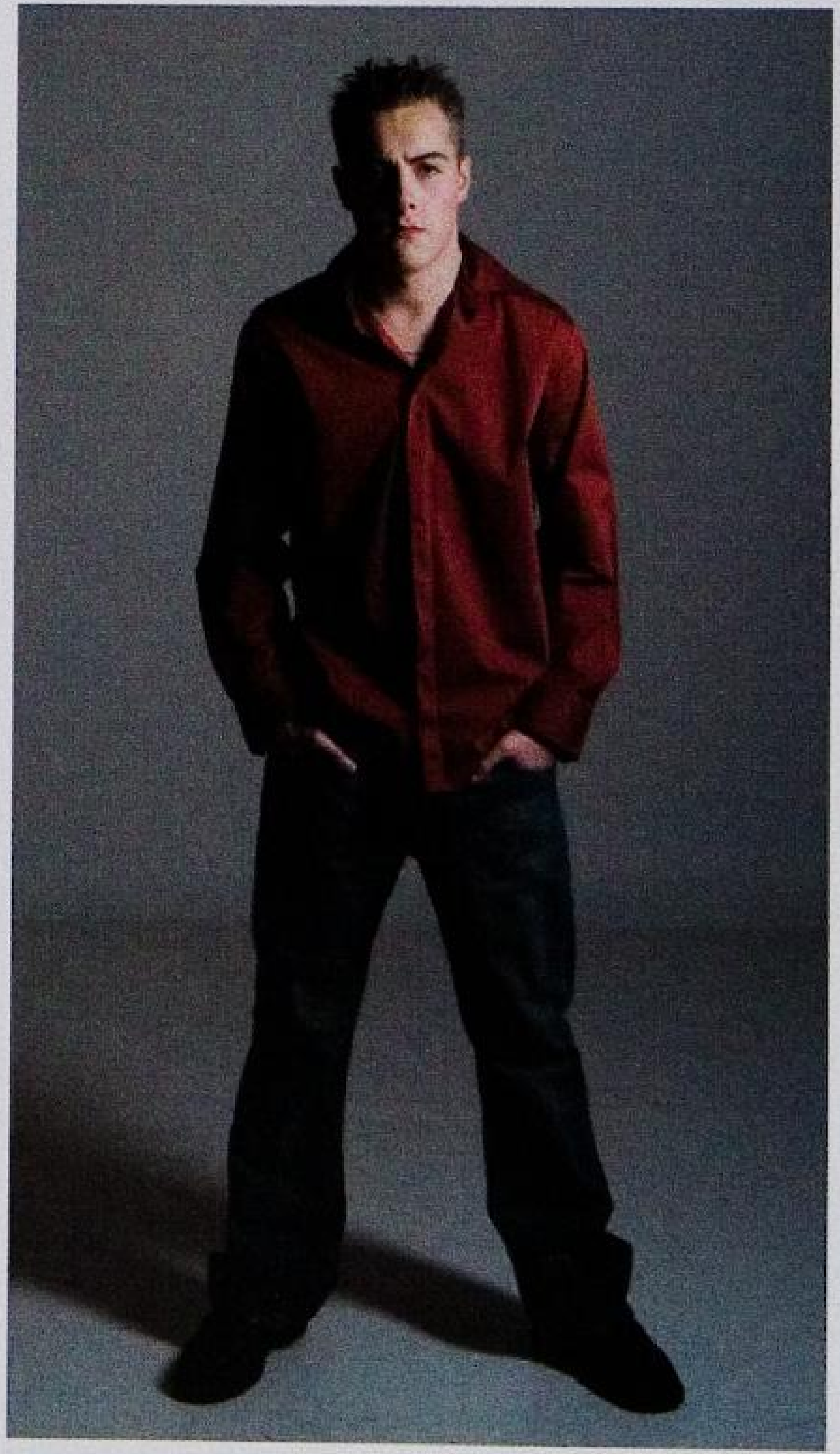
In addition to the standard square-shaped soft boxes, there are also shaped soft boxes, which change not only the shape of the light but also the shape of the highlight in the eye. I use a 70-inch (180-cm) hex-oval soft box, which I think mimics the shape of a face and gives a natural vignette. Its size also makes it ideal for large groups. A strip soft box is ideal for full-length shots; as well as controlling the light spillage, it gives a slightly sharper edge. A large Octa-lite gives a very soft light, but it is impractical to use in a small studio. There are several other products on the market, all of which soften the light and give shape to the catchlight in the eye.



Small soft box
A small soft box gives more contrast because of its size and lack of diffusion material.



Medium-sized soft box
Because of its size, a medium-sized or large soft box can illuminate more than one person (or a larger area of one subject). It also gives you more control over the light source, because you can remove extra layers of diffusion material.



Strip soft box
A long, narrow soft box is known as a strip soft box. It gives a narrow illumination, which is perfect for capturing detail, but illuminates only a small area.

Modifying the Light

When you start to introduce lighting attachments, lights can become almost a paintbrush, allowing you to let your creativity run wild. There are many ways to manipulate the light to enhance your portraits and the accessories that some of the manufacturers have designed are truly amazing.

Most accessories are available in a number of internal finishes, and the finish determines the shape and spread of the light as well as its softness or specularity. There are three main finishes.

A polished finish creates a very harsh, mirror-like reflectancy. It is superb for bouncing light off ceilings and for maximizing the spread of light, but it creates hard shadows and a high contrast if it is directed at the subject.

Textured silver is a stippled surface that is used to diffuse the light slightly. It ensures a smooth distribution of light and is used mainly with large reflector dishes to throw out lots of light.

A neutral metallic finish softens the light more than the other two finishes.

Reflector dishes

My favorite light-modifying accessory is the parabolic (soft-light) reflector, which is designed for portraiture and beauty photography. Its double diffusion cap covers the main flash tube and then diffuses the light through a large reflector dish to give a broad, but very soft, lighting effect. I use it mainly with individual portraits, but I can use it for up to three people.

My second most used lighting accessory is a key-light reflector dish. It spreads the light over a broad area and, because it has a stippled silver interior, it distributes the light evenly, with no hot spots.

The size of the reflector dish itself controls the spillage of the light; the wider the dish, the greater the spillage. The depth of the dish also has an effect on the spillage. Think about the effect you require before you buy.

Other types of accessory

Other accessories modify the light in very specific ways. A honeycomb grid, which can be attached to the front of a reflector dish, lets you concentrate the pool of light into an effective spotlight. You can alter the spread of the light by switching to a honeycomb of a different size; this is ideal when you are trying to light particular parts of the body and control the spillage of light.

Clip-on barn doors can be added to any reflector dish to control the spillage of the light. They allow you to manipulate the light swiftly while you are shooting. Barn doors can be used individually, in pairs, or in groups of four.

You can add color to the background or to the subject by using heat-resistant colored gels. Gels can be clipped on to any of the reflector dishes, but I use them mainly on the key-light reflectors, with or without a honeycomb grid.

A snoot attachment, which is a tunnel-like cone, can be used as a simple spotlight or as an additional hair light. Because it does not diffuse the light, it creates a brighter—and hence sharper—highlight.

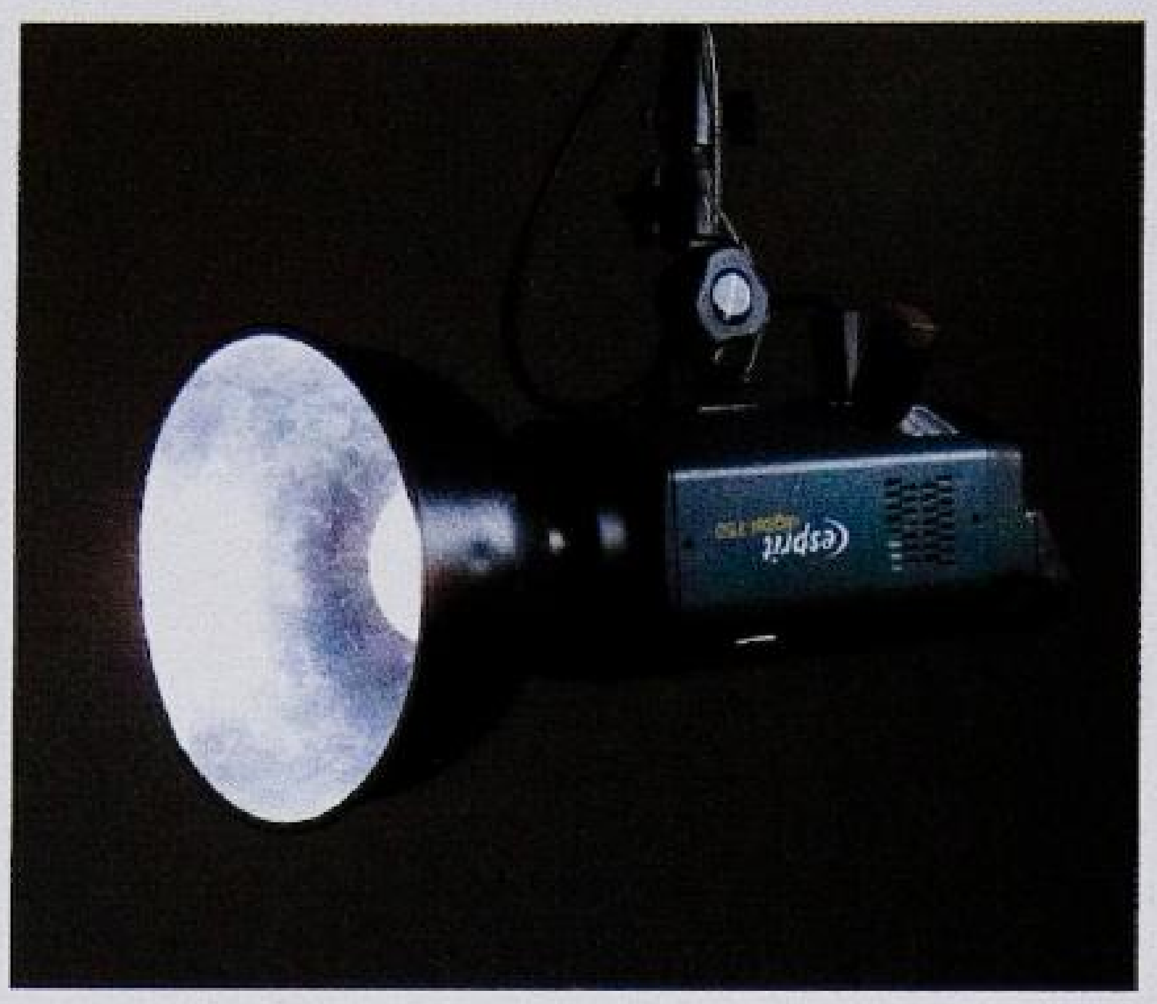
Spotlight attachments are a great way to change a simple background into something more interesting. Cut-out shapes, known as gobos, can be projected through the glass lens in the spotlight; the pattern can be something as simple as foliage or as intricate as a stained-glass church window. The projection can also be focused by means of a movable glass element.

A ring flash is not an accessory but a flash unit in its own right. The product is quite unique, as you shoot through the middle of the ring flash. It is fantastic when you are working close to a background, as it produces virtually no shadow around the subject.

tip

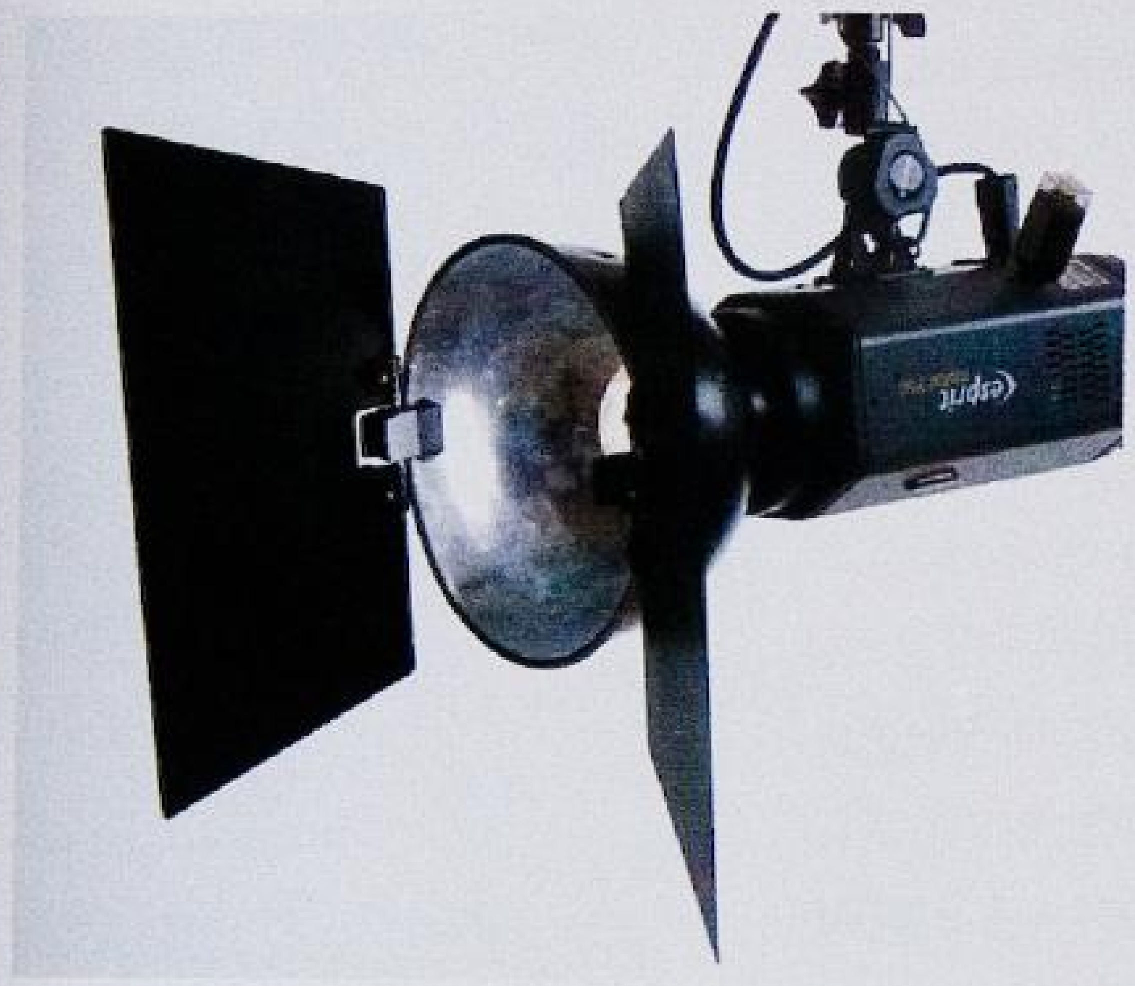
✦ Decide what effects you want to create before you start the session; even make a list to remind yourself of what you want to achieve. A little pre-planning will enable you to work faster and more efficiently and ensure that you get the variety of shots you want.

Parabolic reflector
A parabolic reflector gives a soft, uniform light.

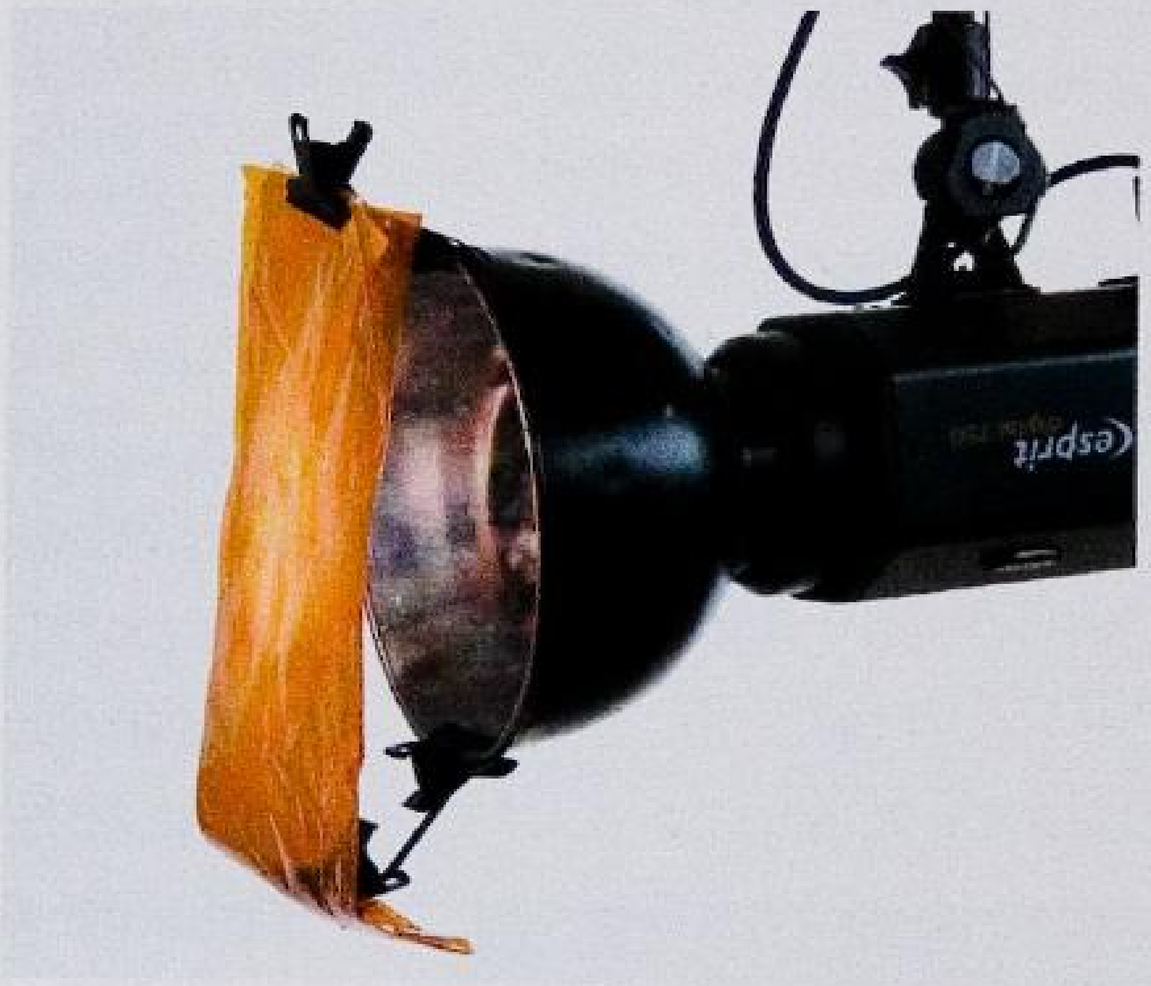


Key-light reflector
The highly polished interior of a key-light reflector produces a hot spot and harsh shadows that are very similar to sunlight.

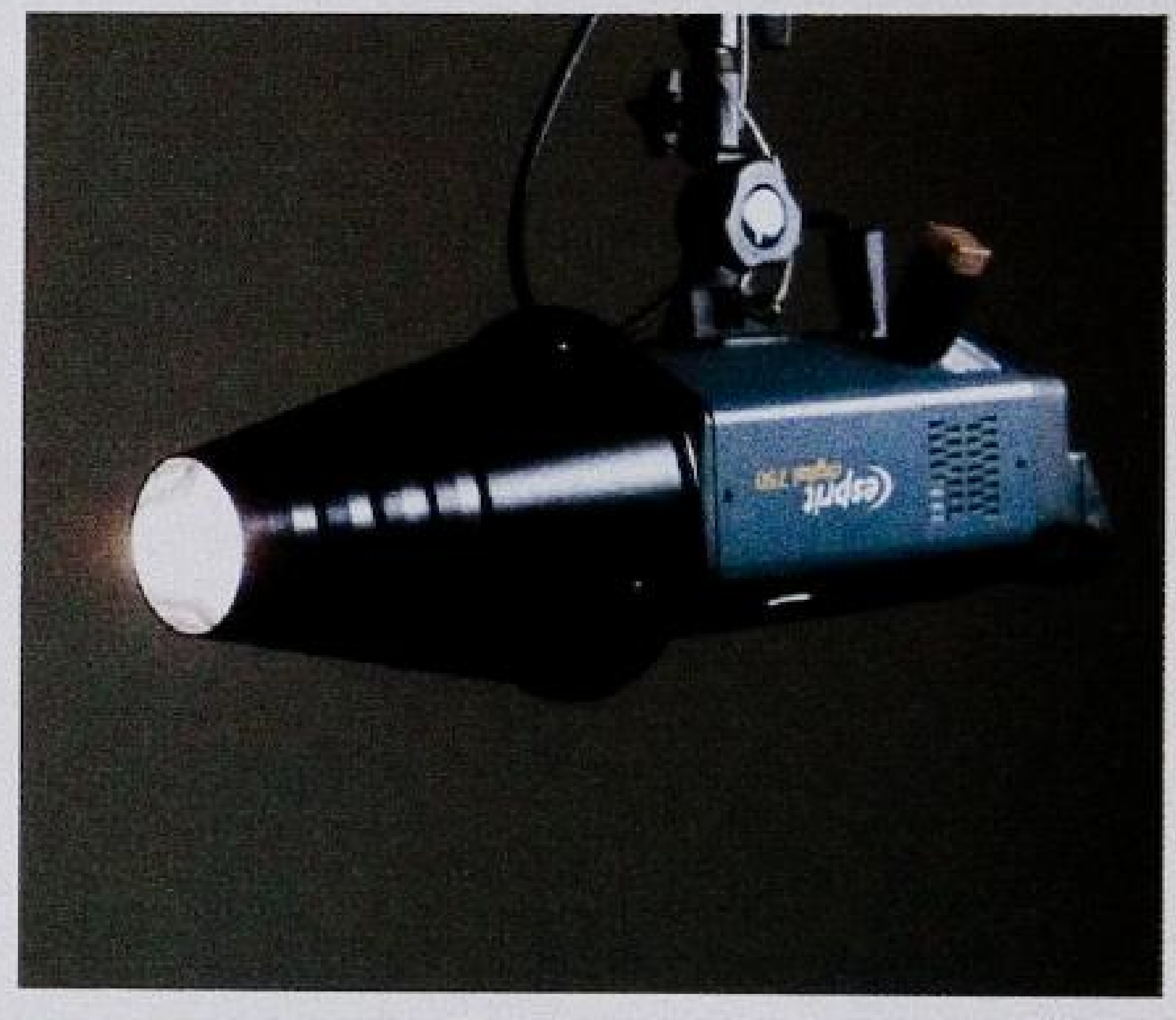
Honeycomb grid
The honeycomb attachment prevents the light from spilling and hence ensures that it travels in a straight line. It produces a sharper light with greater control than a snoot.



Barn doors
Barn doors can be opened or closed to control and shape the light on the background, as well as for effect when lighting a subject.



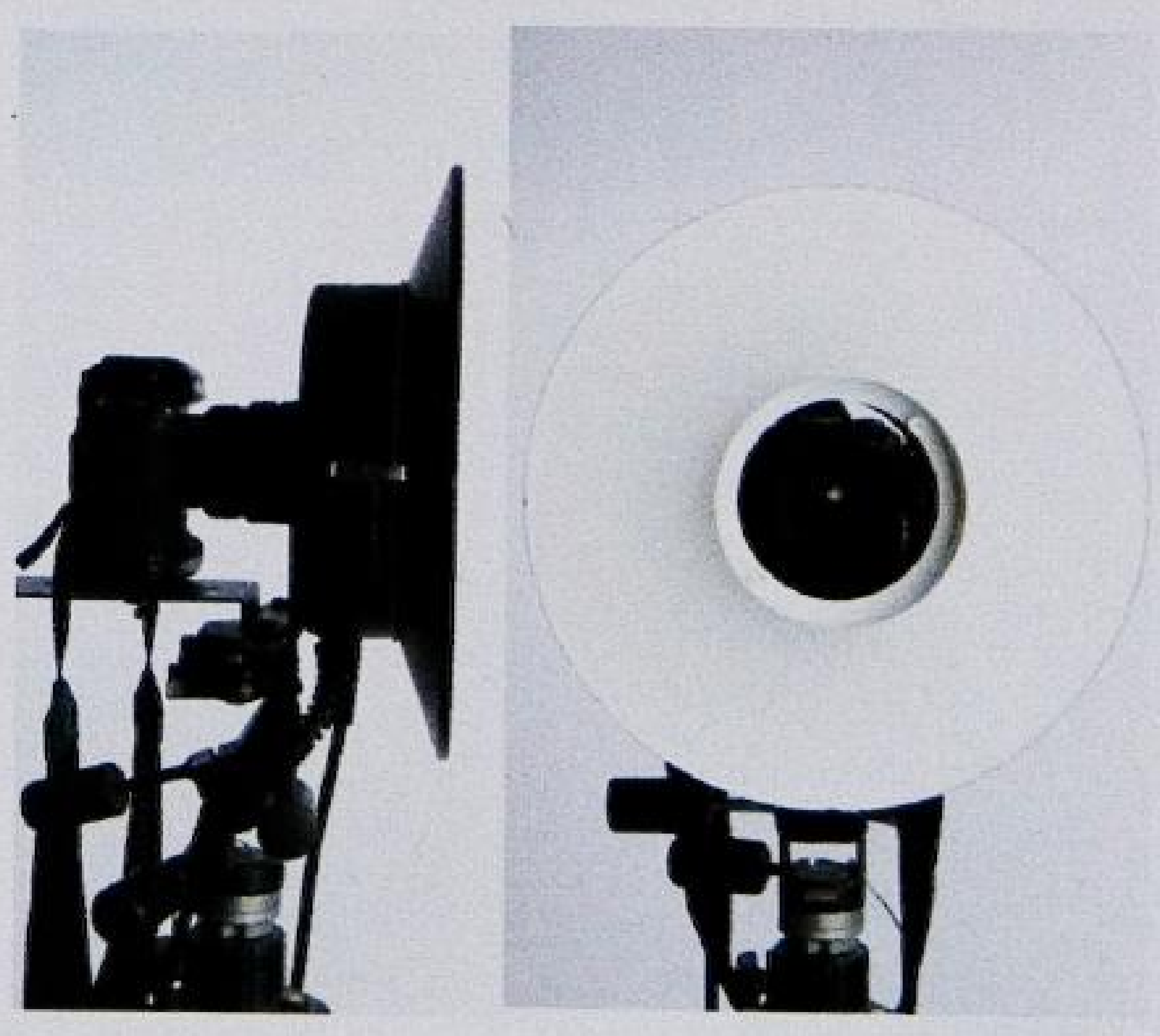
Colored gels
Colored gels can be attached to a reflector dish by means of double clips.



Snoot
The snoot attachment is used mainly on the hair light to control the direction of the light. It is used to concentrate the light to a tighter beam, like an out-of-focus spotlight.

Spotlight
Spotlights are used to create a focused light on the subject or background.

Gobos
A gobo (a patterned stencil-like sheet of acetate) is attached to the front of a spot light. Because the light from the spot is focused by passing through glass elements, the pattern on the gobo is projected onto the background or subject.



Ring flash
A ring flash is an expensive accessory, but because it produces no shadow, it is ideal for beauty shots.

Reflecting the light

Once you know how to reflect a natural or electronic light source, you will be able to master many of the lighting techniques that we use in portraiture and paint your subject with light.

Reflector colors for different effects
- ✦ White: use for very sunny climates when you need a soft reflection.
- ✦ Gold: use to create an exaggerated, warm light.
- ✦ Silver: use to give a mirror like or high reflectancy of the light.
- ✦ Sunlight: use to create a slightly warm glow.
- ✦ Sunfire: use to create a warm sharp, highlight.
- ✦ Black: use to subtract light and create modeling.

A reflector, which can be something as simple as a piece of white card or even a wall, is something that no photographer can do without. Provided the light is coming from the right direction, a reflector will enable you to reflect or bounce light—either to fully light the subject or to illuminate and lift shadow detail in even the darkest areas.

The concept behind using a reflector is simple: when the light is coming from the side of or behind your subject, position a reflector in front of the subject to reflect light back onto his or her face. If the sun is directly falling on your subject, whether above or from the side, place a diffusion reflector between the subject and the sun to soften the contrast of the light; it will also help to prevent your subject from squinting.

In extreme lighting conditions, such as very sunny or flat overcast days, use a black reflector to deaden the light coming from one side or above; this has the effect of increasing the amount of shadow and creating modeling on the face.

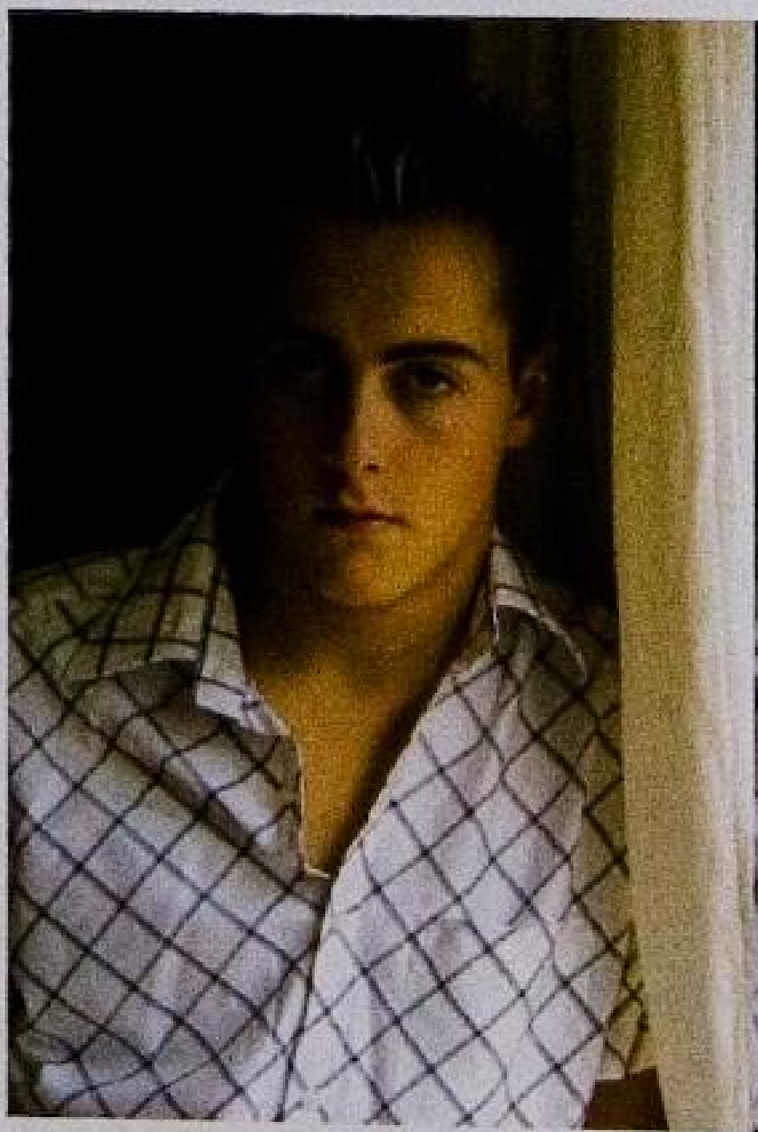
A trigger-grip reflector panel
This type of reflector panel has a trigger grip that allows you to work alone instead of having to rely on assistants or stands and framework.

Types of reflector

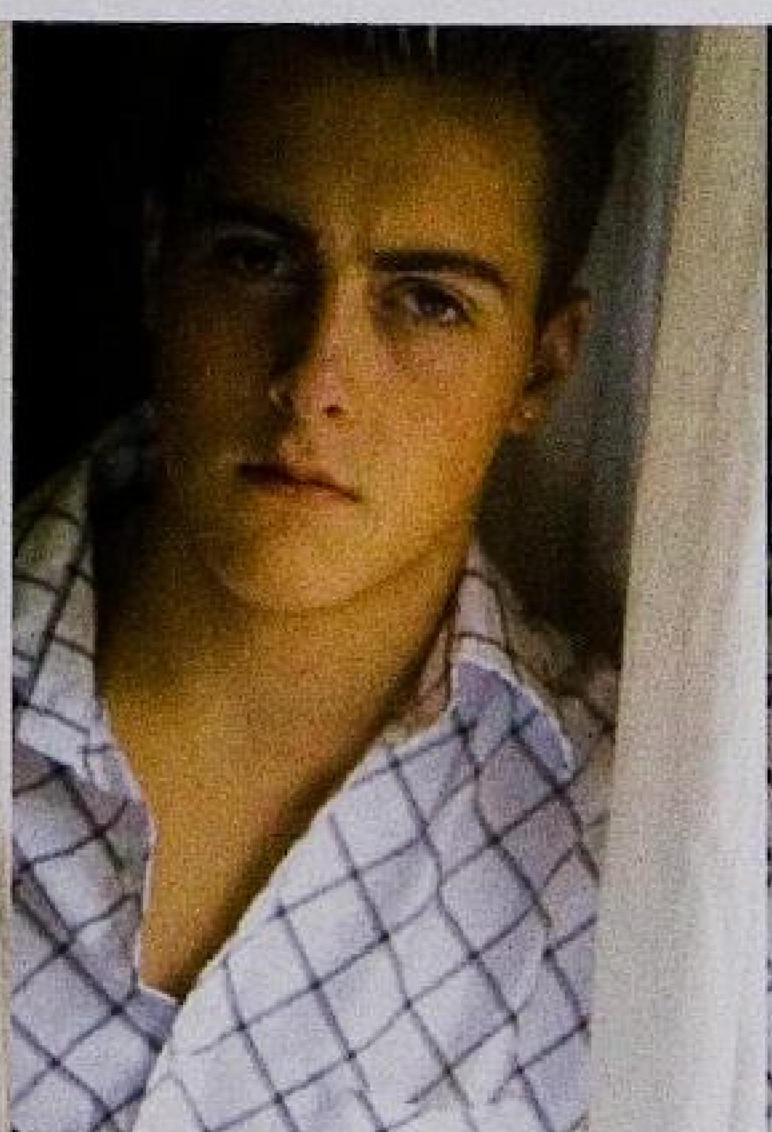
There are two types of reflector: diffusion reflectors, which are made of a translucent material and reduce and diffuse light, and colored reflectors, which bounce reflected light onto the subject and add a slight color to the light.

Foldaway reflectors of both types are available in a range of sizes, from a 12-inch (30-cm) disc to a 6 x 4-feet (1.8 x 1.2-m) panel. It is probably best to start with a 30- or a

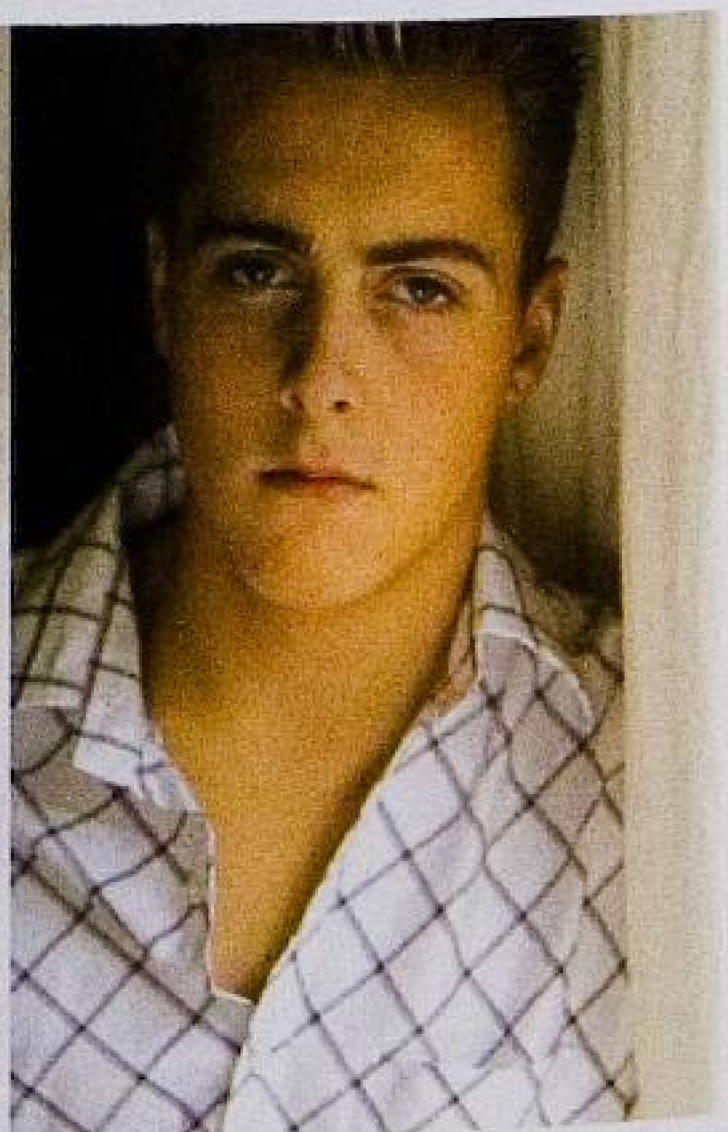
The effects of different colors of reflector
With no reflector panel the image has slightly less detail in the shadows and is darker on the left-hand side. When a silver reflector panel is placed in front of the subject, the high reflectancy of the material illuminates some of the shadow detail and increases the clarity and sharpness of the light. A sunlight reflector panel positioned in the same place gives warmth to the reflected light and hence the image is warmer and softer.



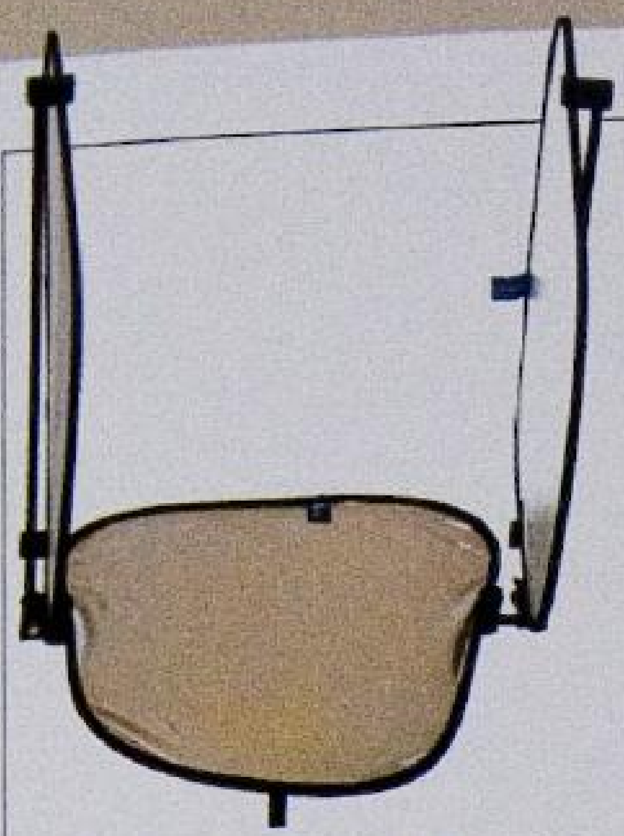
Without a reflector panel



Silver-sided reflector panel



Sunlight reflector panel



Tri-reflector (above)
The individual panels of the Tri-reflector can be positioned at different angles to create different lighting effects on the subject; moreover, the reflector panels are dual-sided, making it an incredibly versatile studio tool.

Reflectors
Reflectors are available in many sizes and colors, with the different materials and colors being used to alter the reflectancy of the light. These are from the Lastolite range.

From front to back: gold, diffusion panel, silver, sunfire, sunlight, diffusion panel.

38-inch (76- or 96-cm) reflector panel, as they are small enought can be use both on location and in the studio.

Diffusion reflectors are used to lower the contrast on the subject by diffusing the light source or to brighten the background by subtracting some of the intensity of the light from the subject. They can also be positioned in a window to reduce and diffuse the light that is coming through; I often use one in this way when I am working on location in a client's home.

The materials from which colored reflectors are made are designed to reflect the light source in different ways. A gold reflector gives a sharp and intense yellow glow to the skin tone, whereas a white reflector gives a soft and neutral reflection of light. The choice of color is very subjective: some photographers like a colder, more neutral image; I prefer a warmer reflection of the light and tend to use the sunfire/silver range, which is silver on one side and sunfire on the other (most reflectors are dual sided). Sunfire is a mixture of white, silver, and gold thread, which has a very high reflective return of the light because of its glossy sheen; it is intended to mimic the effect of sunlight, slightly warming the subject with a soft glow. The silver side is ideal for slightly duller days when you need to increase reflectancy and sharpen the highlight; when you need a greater return of light, position the reflector farther away.

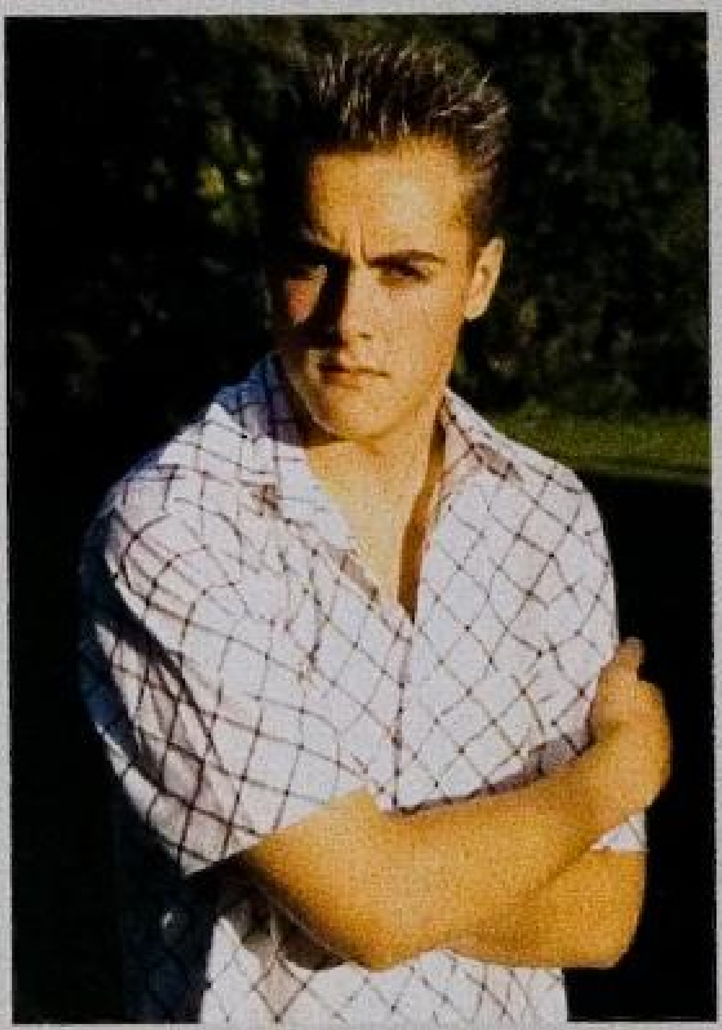
In the studio I use a product called a Tri-Reflector, which is a lazy man's way of being able to control three different reflectors at the same time. Each reflector is attached to a moveable arm, allowing you to make precise changes to the light. Tri-Reflector panels are available in gold/white and sunfire/silver combinations, as well as in translucent fabric to create a softer effect.

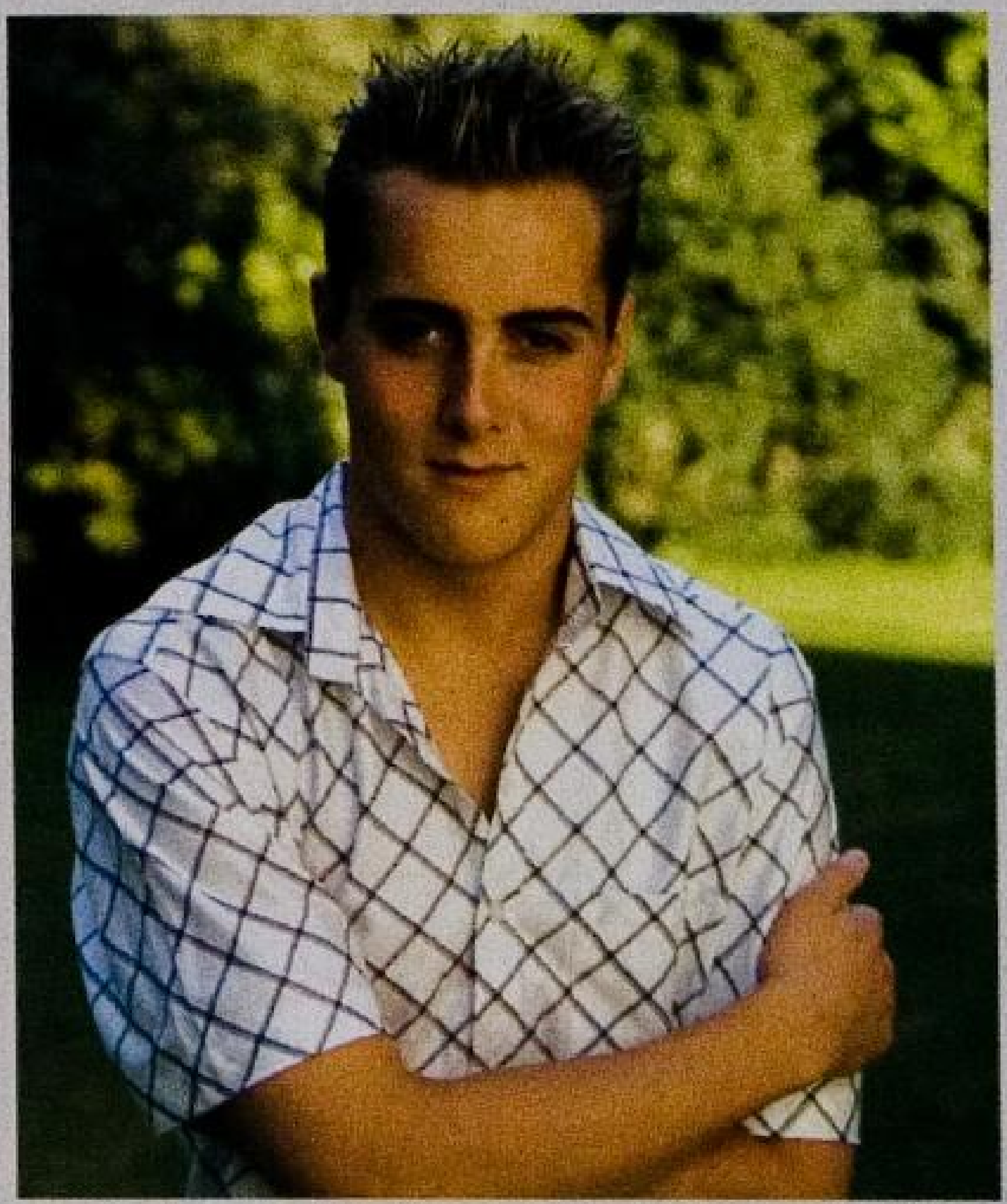
Now try this...

Place a piece of white card against a wall, with a light to one side. Hold each of the following items in front of the card in turn and observe how the reflected light changes.

- Silver foil
- Silver fabric
- Gold wrapping paper
- Gold fabric
- Black fabric

Using a diffusion panel
This sequence shows how a diffusion panel has drastically reduced the contrast of the evening sunlight. Placing the diffusion panel close to the subject creates a much softer light but maintains modeling on the face; it also increases shadow detail on both the subject and the background.





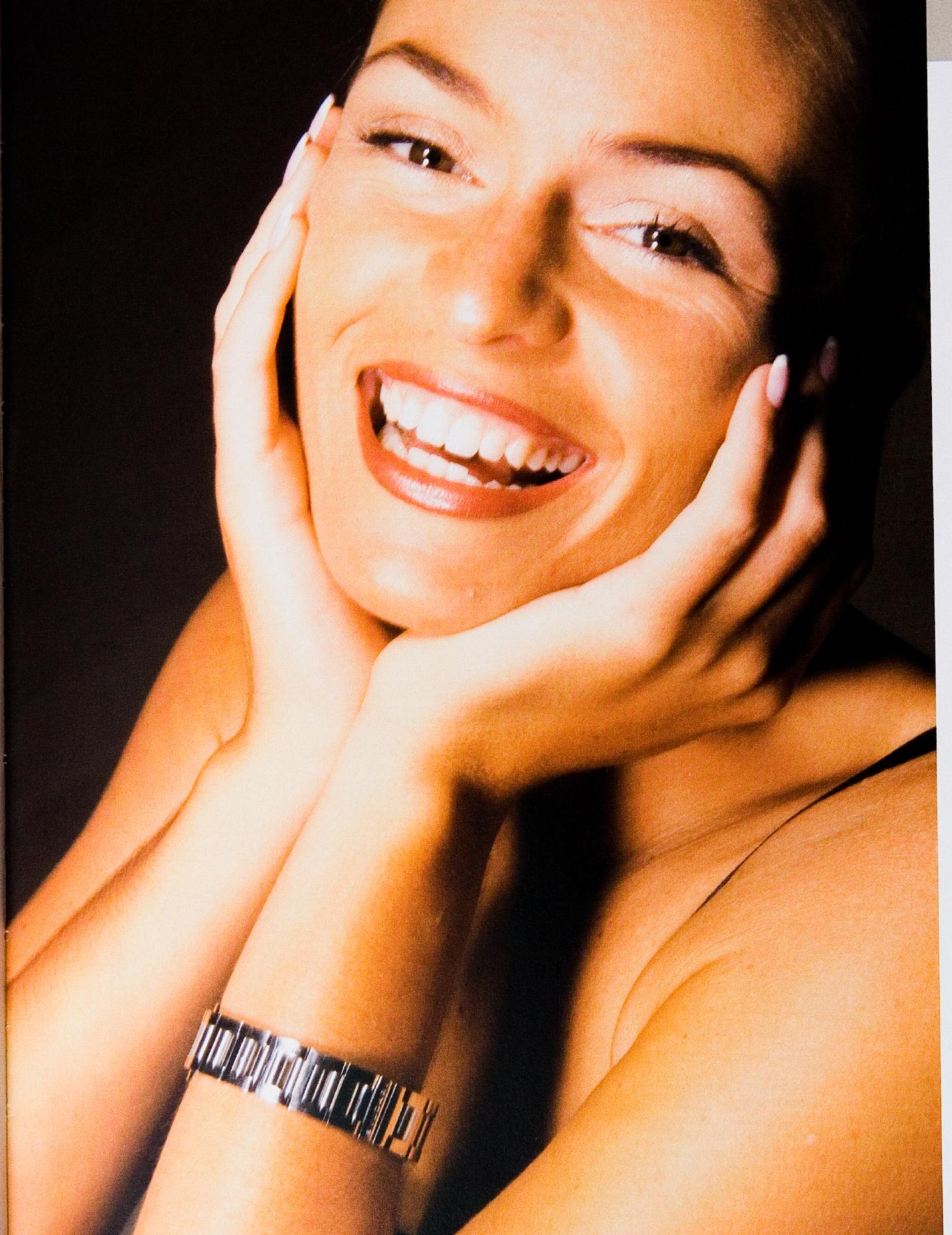
Above: Without a diffusion panel, the light is harsh and contrasty.

Above right: A diffusion panel is placed close to the subject.

Right: With the diffusion panel in place, the light has been softened.

2 Poses and Expressions

The secret of any great portrait lies in the pose and expression and it is up to you, as the photographer, to communicate with your subjects and convey what you want them to do. In this chapter we look at ways of creating poses to give shape and dynamics to the portrait, as well as at how to make your subject look relaxed and natural.



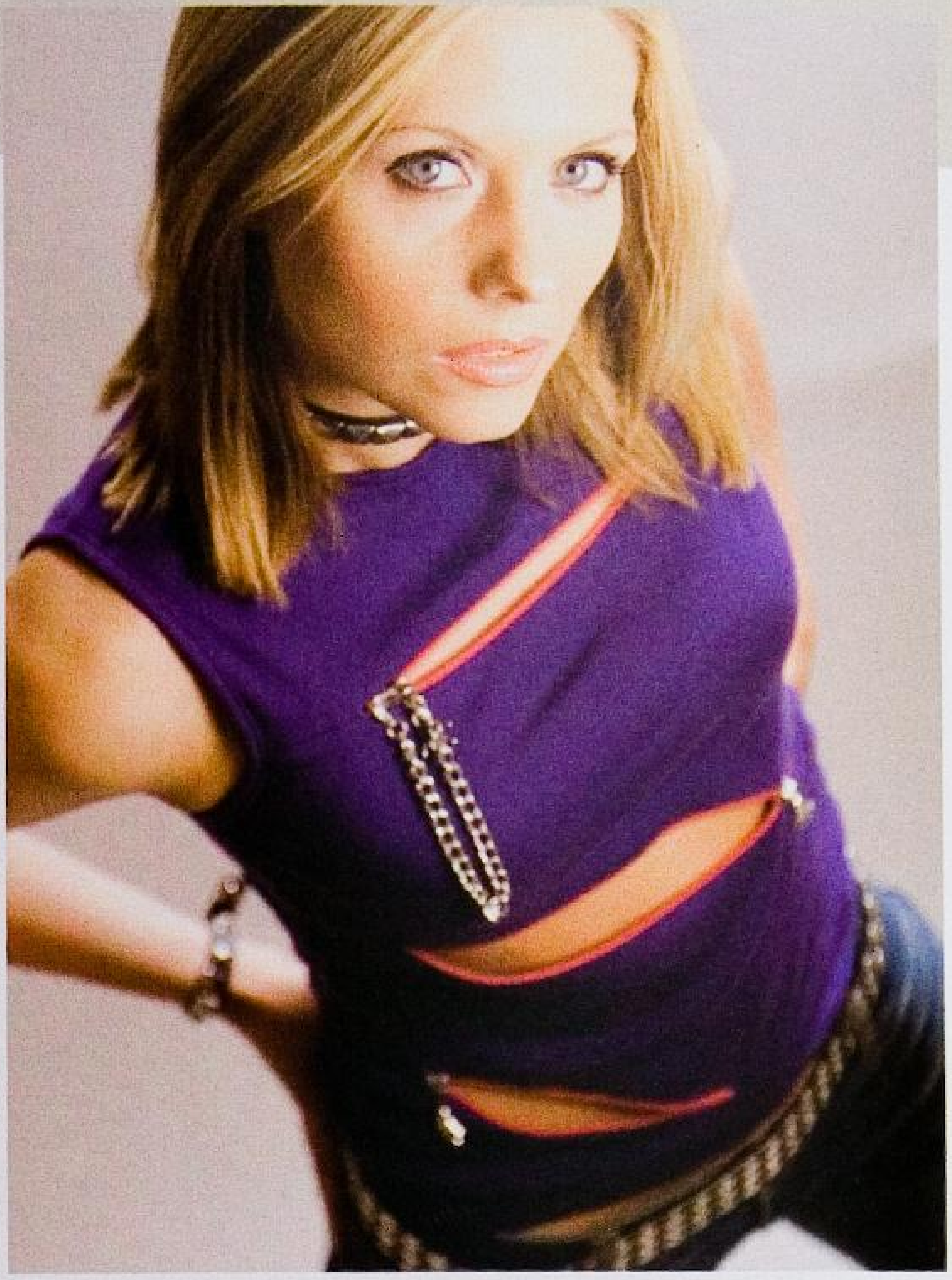
Practical Posing

The way your subjects pose for the camera is an essential part of the overall portrait, as their body language, using the natural curves of the body and limbs, conveys their mood and character.

The shape and pose of the body also help the composition, by bringing dynamic shapes and lines into the frame. The way the feet are posed will give balance, the position of the arms and hands will give animation to the pose, and the head and face will provide the expression.

Feet

Every pose, whether it is a full-length shot or a head-and-shoulders portrait, starts with the feet, as it is the way in which the subject stands that determines whether or not he or she looks comfortable. As a rule,



Aggressive stance
I chose a high camera angle to look down on my subject and show more of her stance. The subject's weight was on her front foot, with her legs slightly apart; both hands were pushed into the back of the hip to distort the body. The torso was turned away slightly to slim the figure, and a forward tilt of the head allowed the eyes to be more sexually aggressive.

Shifting the balance
This stance, with the subject's weight on her front foot and one foot crossed over the other, is contemporary but natural looking. To exaggerate her slim shape and allow the eye to travel through to the background, I created a space between the arm and the torso, and also between the legs. The forward tilt of the head relaxes the stance and the mood of the portrait.

Best foot forward
The positioning of the feet gives structure and a base for any pose, helping not only the balance of the subject but also the gracefulness of the stance.

Feet square to camera
When the feet are square on to camera, the stance looks more aggressive.

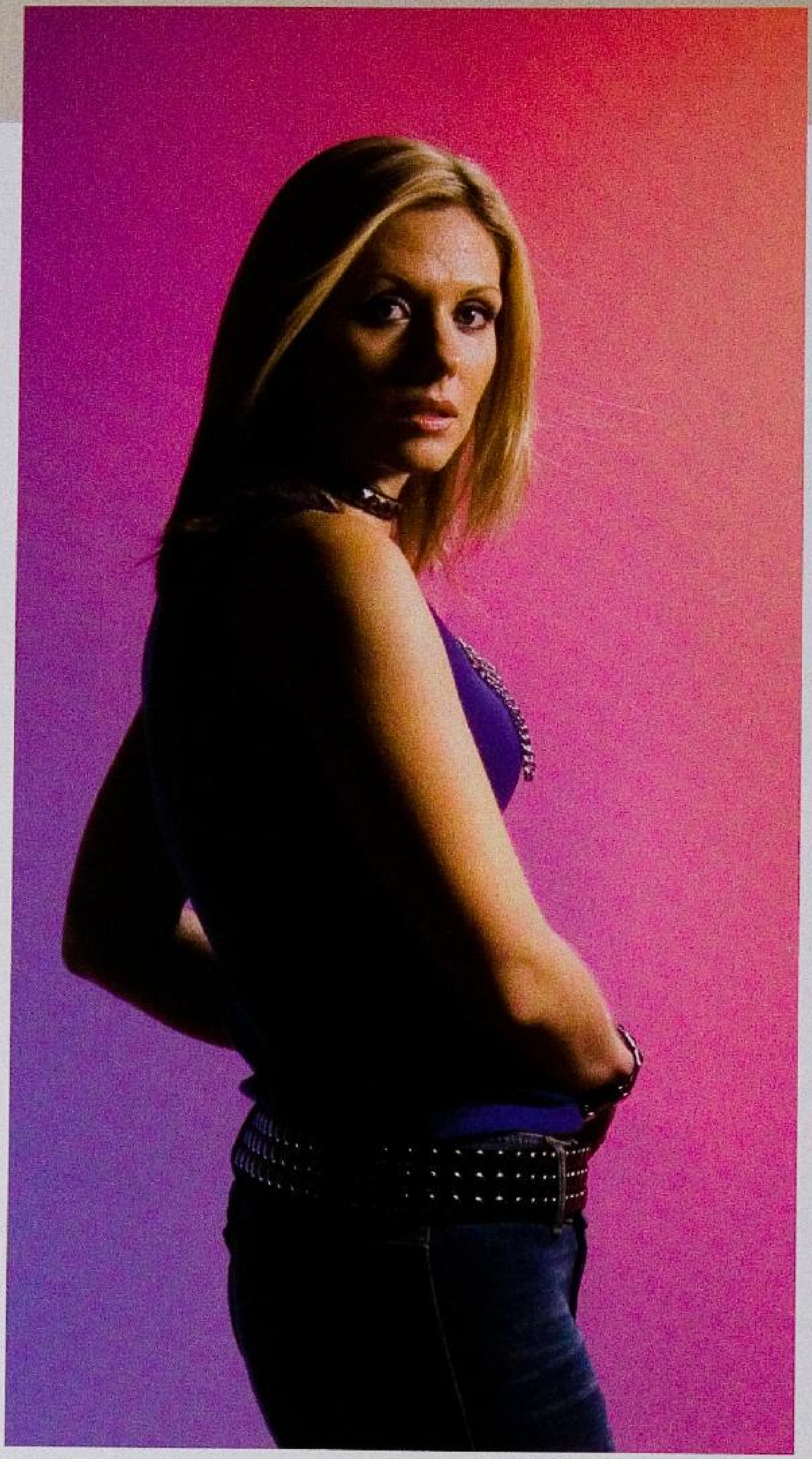
Back foot at 90° to the camera
With the back foot at 90° to the camera, the torso and hips are slightly twisted, making the subject look thinner.

Feminine stance
With the weight on the back foot, the front foot is both the point of balance and a show foot for elegance in the pose.

the back foot should be positioned at 90° to the camera, with the front foot pointing toward the camera; this naturally turns the subject's body at a slight angle. When the feet are planted square on to the camera, the subject looks more dominant and aggressive.

Legs and hips

When we stand up straight, our knees are locked, giving strength to the stance. When one leg is allowed to relax, the knee and ankle naturally bend, relaxing the pose. When the weight of the body is on one foot, the hip of that same leg automatically pushes outward, which is why it is generally better for the weight of the body to be taken on the back foot, as the hip will look less dominant. However, a pushed-out hip in a portrait can also be used to convey a confrontational attitude—a device often used in contemporary portraiture.



Creating shape
With the weight of the body on the back foot, the front arm was wrapped around the body to slightly turn the body away from the camera; this exaggerates the turn of the head back to camera, drawing attention to the strength of the subject's gaze and expression. The head was maintained in an upright position to complement the pose.

"Canoe boats"
When a high camera angle is chosen or the subject's head is lowered, more of the white of the eye under the pupil is visible. This area of white is canoe shaped—hence the term. This technique is often used to give a more feminine look.

Torso

When the body is turned at a slight angle to the camera, there is less visible width between the shoulders and so the body looks thinner. When the weight is applied to the back foot, the back shoulder naturally dips lower, again making the subject look more relaxed and natural, avoiding a stoop or slouch of the body. When the shoulders are square on to camera, the pose takes on a heavier and more aggressive look because the body appears to be wider.

Head

When it is relaxed, the head naturally leans slightly to one side, and we can make use of this body language in portraiture. Tilting the head toward the higher front shoulder makes the face look narrower and, because the chin is lowered, the eyes are given more emphasis, making this both a relaxed and a feminine-looking pose. If the head is tilted too far forward, however, the subtlety of the pose is lost and the pose becomes submissive.

Eyes

The eyes are the most powerful part of any portrait. Make sure that you control the direction of your subject's gaze, whether it is directly toward the camera or off to one side. When your subject looks directly at the camera, simply lowering or raising the chin can create a different mood: when the chin is lowered, the eyes become bigger making them more attractive or aggressive depending on the expression of the mouth and eyebrows. When your subject looks away from the camera, it is harder to see the expression of the eye.

When we move from a standing to a seated pose, there is a dramatic change in body language: people invariably feel less tense and more relaxed when they are sitting down.

Seated in a chair

When you ask people to sit in a chair, they often try to sit as they would in the comfort of their own home. This is great if they have good posture and do not slouch. More often than not, however, they will need to adjust their pose slightly.

Turn the chair slightly so that it is at an angle to the camera. Your subject can now sit toward the front of the chair or posing stool. This has two effects: first, it puts some of the body weight back onto the feet, which helps to control the posture and balance; second, it slightly thins the subject, because the body is turned away from the camera.

The way your subject positions him- or herself in the chair, or leans on the arms or legs of the chair, can also be used to change the animation of the pose and the mood of the shot. By leaning forward toward the camera, he or she will look more interested; by contrast, when he or she leans on the back arm of the chair, the mood of the portrait will become more reserved and insular. If your subject leans forward on the legs of the chair, the pose immediately looks more confident.

▲ Leaning forward
This relaxed portrait was achieved by turning the chair side on to the camera. I then asked the model to rest her elbows on her knees and to cross her hands. The curvature of her back and the overall tone and color of the image give a calm and unobtrusive portrait.

◀ Seating the subject
Positioning the subject toward the front of the chair gives a better posture. I also asked her to lean on the arm of the chair and to cross both arms and legs, to add complement the tilted camera angle.

Aggressive posing
The high camera angle and the open legs combine to make a very aggressive pose.

Softening the stance
Asking the subject to cross her legs and slightly tilt her head makes the pose look less aggressive.

tips

- Posing stools or tubs, which are readily available from photographic suppliers, are a fantastic investment; they are usually sold as a set of different-sized stools, which allows you to cater for subjects of differing heights and to stagger posing heights with groups.
- Use a chair that is large enough for your subject so as to not exaggerate his or her body size; when they sit, their bottom and hips will naturally spread.

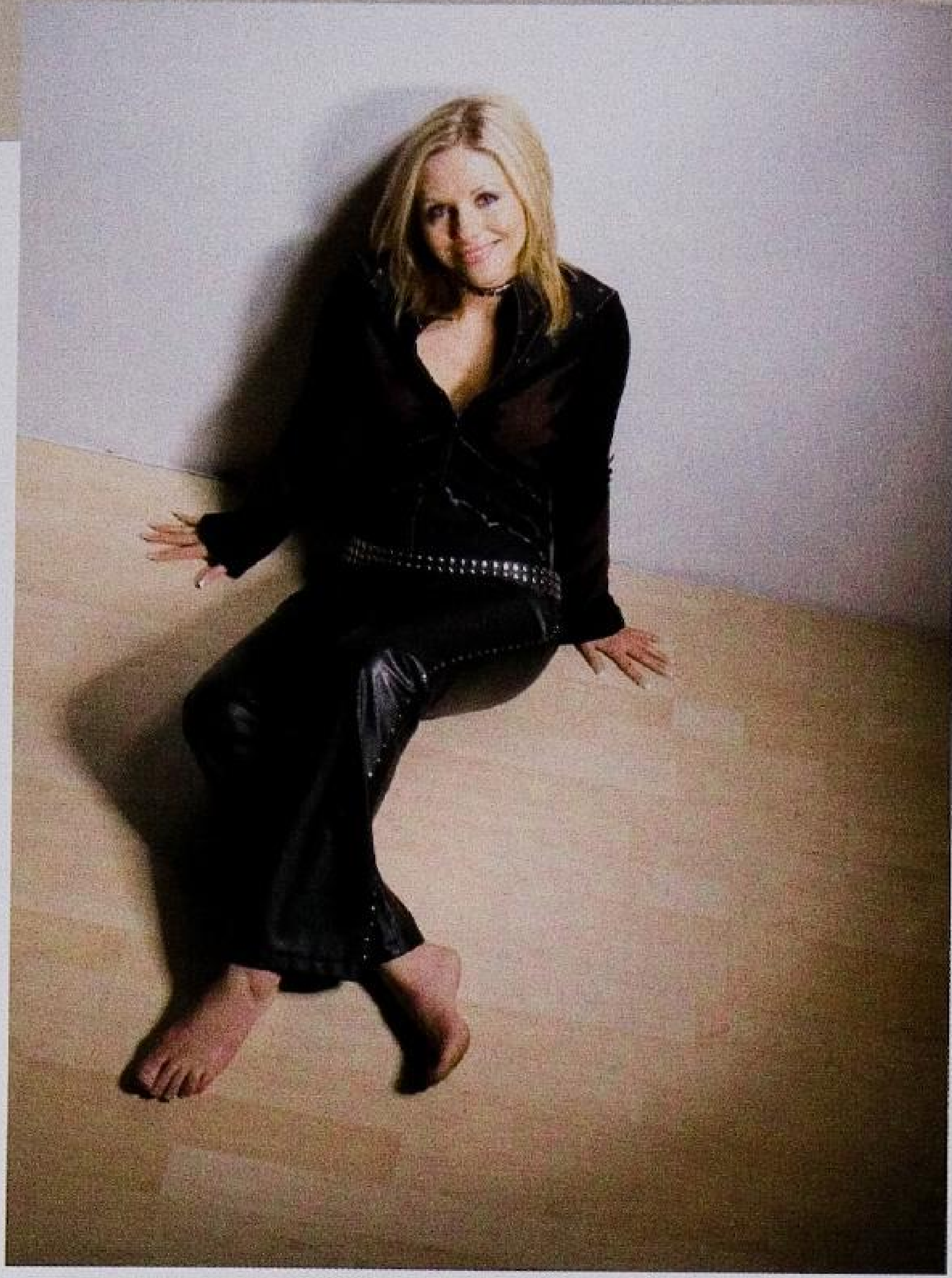
The floor

The floor is a great prop—especially in a small room or one with a low ceiling, as it allows you to lower the subject and not the lighting.

In a crouching pose, the subject has to put all their weight on the balls of their feet; however, some people find it hard to maintain their balance. A crouching pose generally gives a relaxed, confident look; an added advantage is that this pose can be used anywhere, as it does not rely on props.

A cross-legged position does not necessarily mean that your subject has to sit bolt upright: leaning forward, resting their forearm or hands on their knees, relaxes the pose and turns it into a more confident-looking one. Leaning onto the floor—either to the side or to the front—distorts the body shape and changes the mood of the portrait to a more aggressive one.

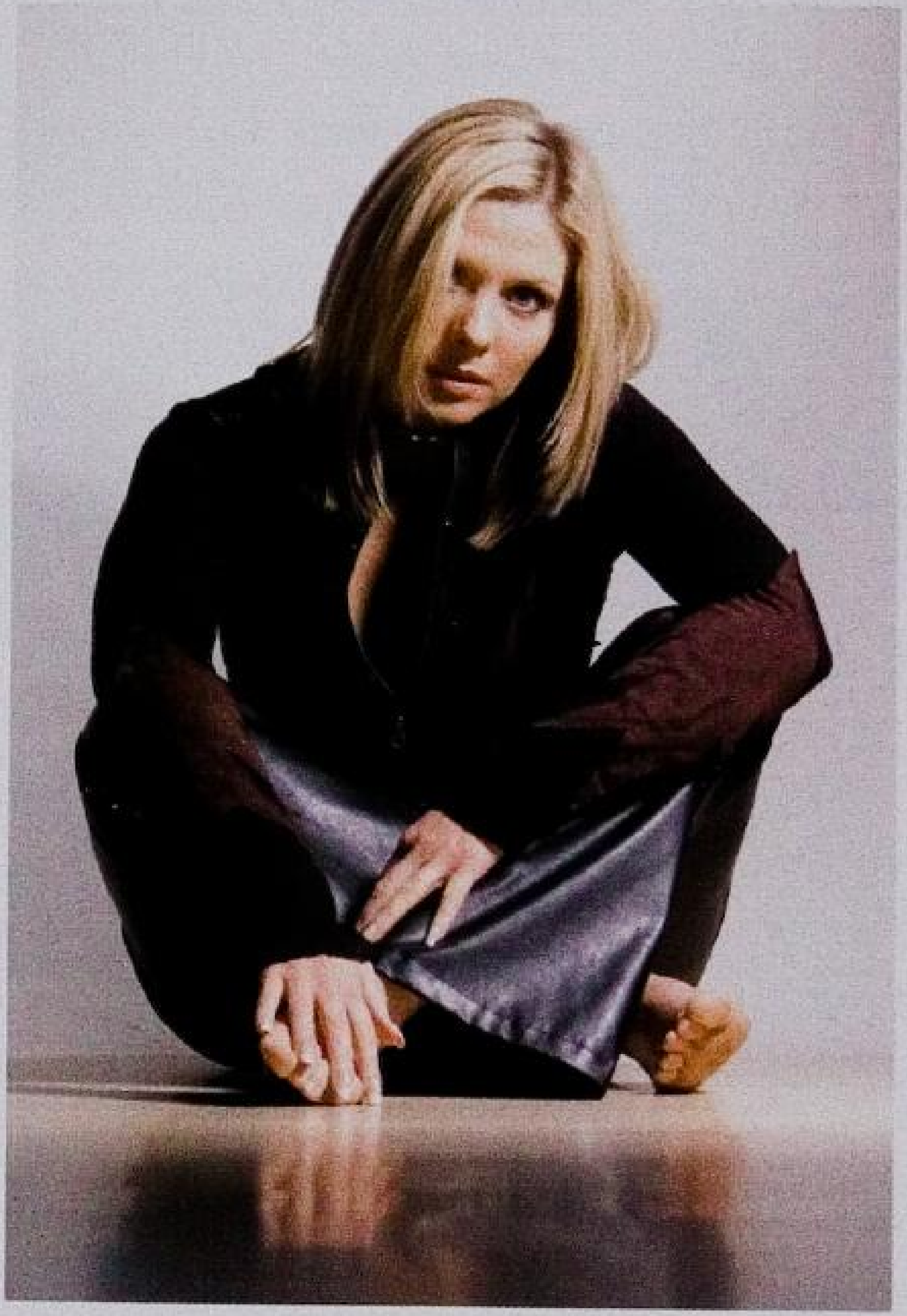
If your subject is sitting on the floor, pay attention to the natural spread of the hips, as this may have the effect of making the body look bigger. It usually looks better if the subject sits on their side, twisting their body so that they are not square on to the camera, as this pushes most of the body behind and out of shot and looks more natural.



Using the floor
Use the hands and feet, especially in full-length portraits, to change the way the subject places his or her body weight and disguise body shape.

tips

- Take care not to position the camera too high if your subject is sitting on the floor, as this will make their body look wider.
- When the floor is part of the background, make sure it is not too heavily patterned, as this will distract from the portrait. If the floor is brightly colored, try taking the image in black and white.

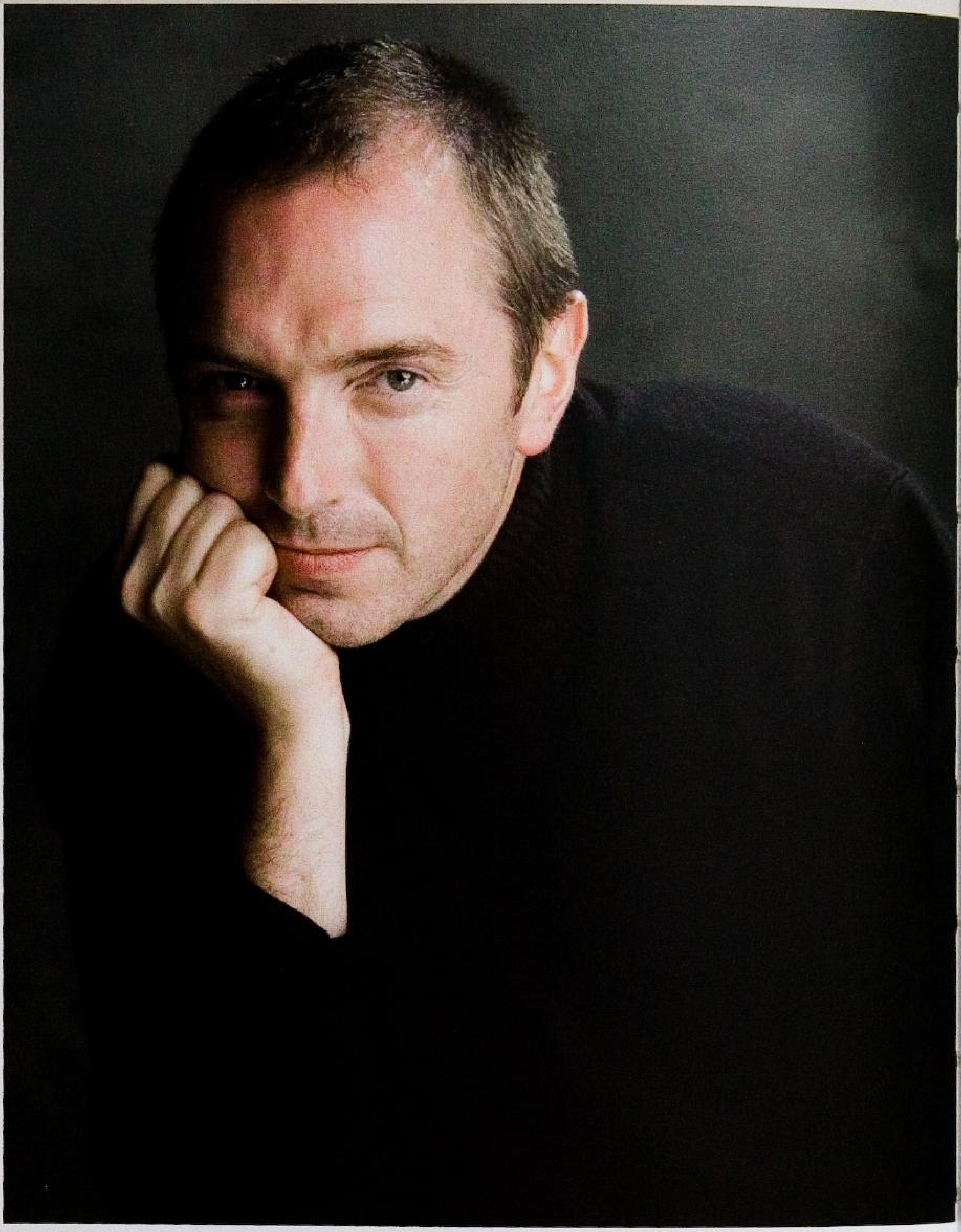


▲ **Cross legged**
The relaxed nature of the pose and the low camera angle make this an interesting portrait.

◀ **Crouching subject**
When a subject is crouching, he or she may overbalance, as all the weight is on the balls of the feet. Here the subject is leaning gently against the background wall, which helps with balance but also gives a relaxed, confident look to the portrait.

Hands

Hands can be extremely expressive and can help to define the character and mood of the sitter. Equally, clumsily posed hands can ruin a potentially strong portrait—but luckily there are some simple guidelines that will help you get good results every time.



Hands can make a portrait, giving animation to the pose and revealing something of your subject's character. They can also totally destroy a portrait if they are too dominant or if they catch and reflect too much of the key light.

Decide at the outset what part the hands will play. If they are not important, make sure they do not pick up any highlight—or even hide them from view behind the subject's back or in a pocket. (However, leaving the thumbs out of the pockets, which shows more of the back of the hand, looks better than hiding them completely.)

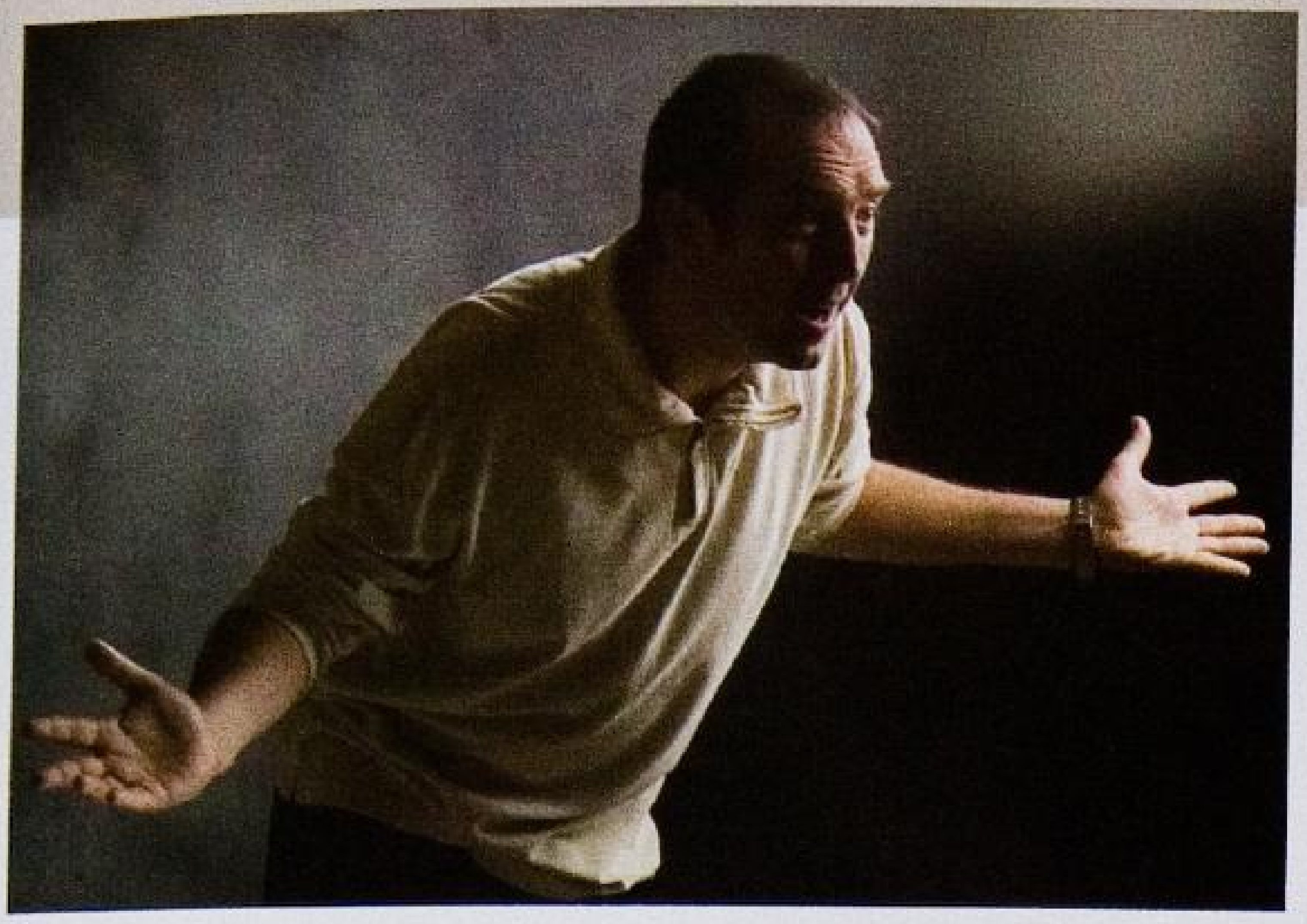
If you want the hands to be visible, there is a very simple way of making them look elegant. If the hand is positioned above the subject's waist level, the wrist should be bent slightly so that the hand points upward, as this looks more natural. When the hand is positioned below the waist, allow it to fall downward; this is the position our hands naturally adopt when we stand.

The hand can become very dominant, especially when it is flat on to camera; this is why we usually show the side, rather than the palm or the back, of the hand, as it is always more pleasing to the eye and makes the hand look slimmer.

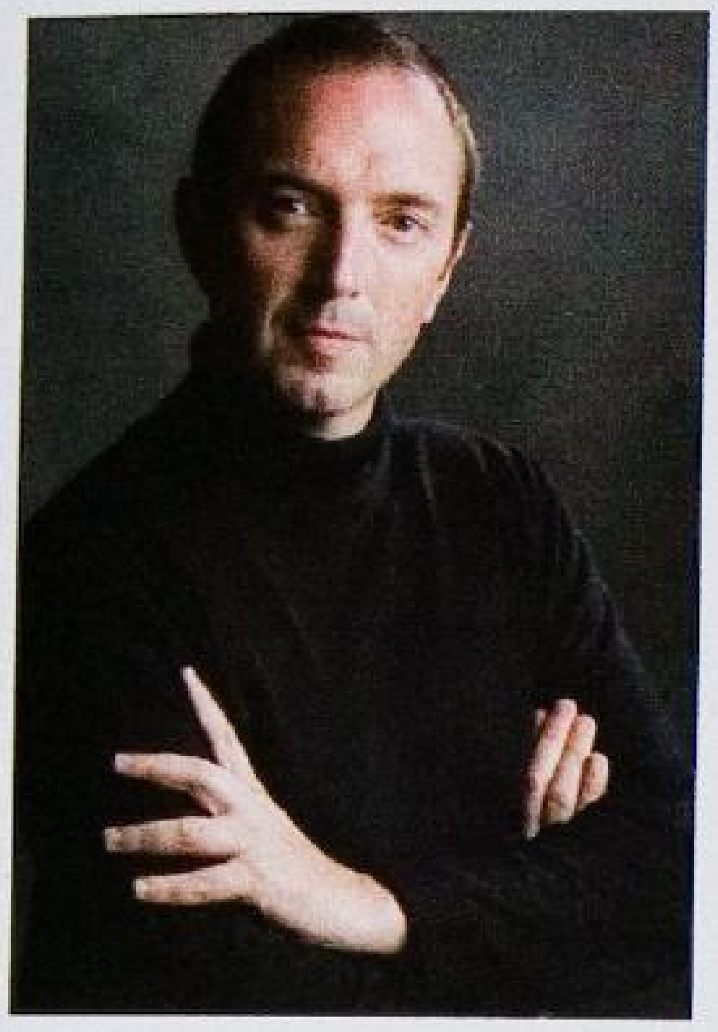
tips

- If your subjects find it hard to pose their hands, try getting them to hold a pen and then remove it, keeping their fingers in the same position.
- If you are not sure whether or not to include the hands, leave them out.
- The side of the hand looks more attractive and slimmer in a portrait than the back of the hand or the palm.

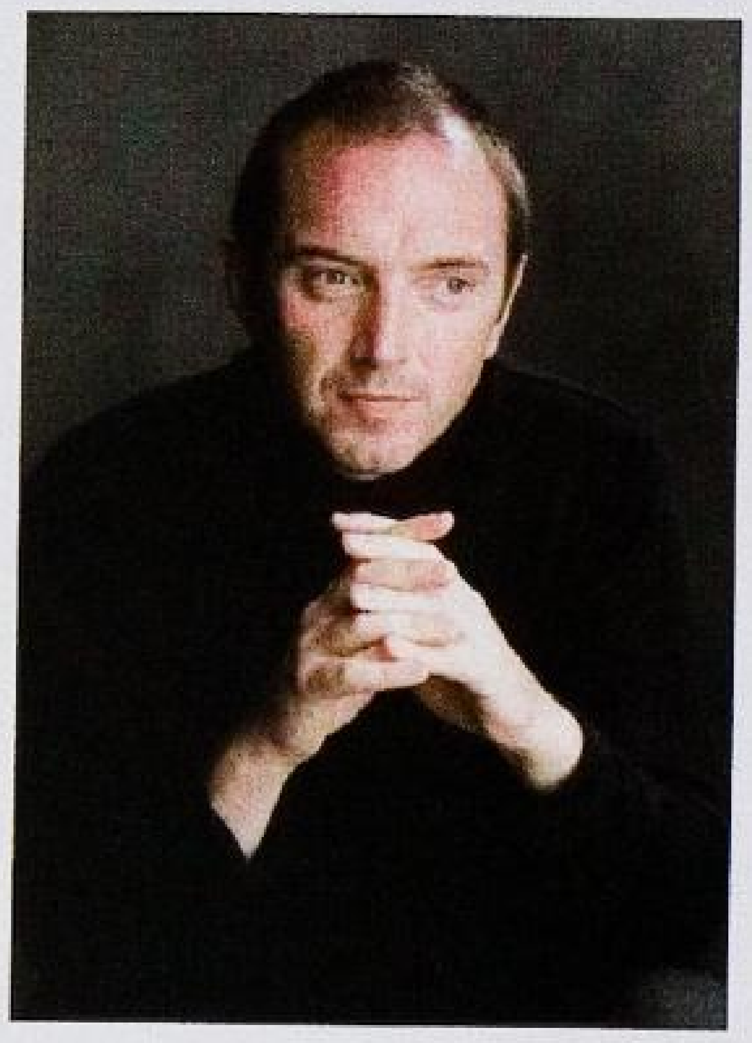
Slimming the hand
It is always important to make sure that the hand does not appear too large in the portrait, particularly when it is near the face. To achieve this, simply turn it so that the camera can see the side of the hand and the subject's chin can rest on the palm; avoid placing the chin too heavily on the hand, as this will distort both the hand and the face.



Expressions
When an expressive portrait is required, a combination of slightly exaggerated hand gestures and facial expression gives a more animated quality to the portrait, allowing viewers to interpret the pose for themselves.



Overposing
Be careful not to place the hand too far forward in the portrait, as this makes it too dominant. The position of the near hand in this portrait, with the wrist bent and the fingers elegantly spread, is generally considered more suitable for a female portrait.



Dominant hands
Here, the hands compete with the face for importance. Whether this is a good or a bad thing depends on the intention behind the portrait: if the hands are being used to show a theatrical expression, it is good; if they are simply part of the overall portrait, the highlights on the hands tend to dominate the image—especially against the black jumper.

Leaving the thumb out
When the subject's hands need to be separated from the trouser pocket, leave out the thumb so that a little more of the hand can be seen.

Bending the wrist down
When the hand is below the waist, regardless of whether the subject is sitting down or not, the hand can naturally relax by allowing the wrist to bend downward.

Finger position
The classic hand pose can be enhanced by stacking the fingers one behind the otherto form a "staircase;" this can be achieved by placing the thumb behind the forefinger.

Bending the wrist up
When the hands are above the waist, the wrist can be bent upward to enhance the graceful shape of the side of the hand.

Pen grip
A simple way of getting a pleasing position of the fingers is to get the sitter to pick up a pen and then slide it out, leaving the fingers in the same position.

Dressing for Success

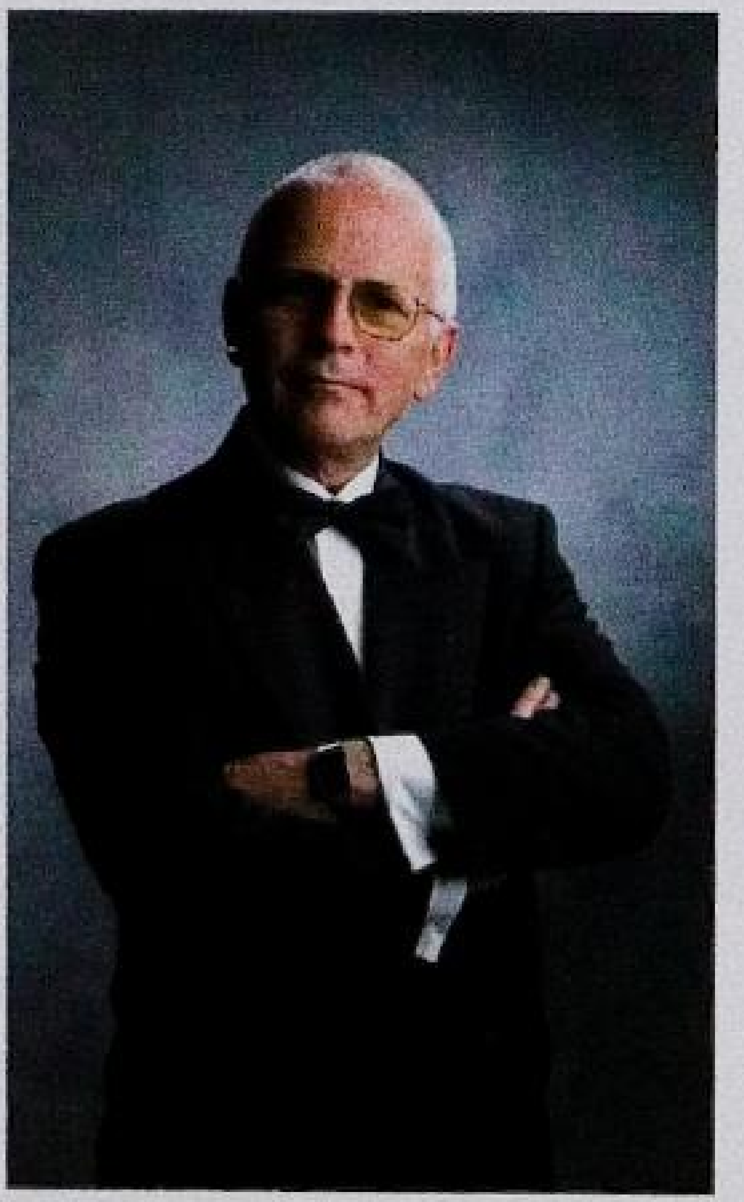
The overall style of the portrait is usually determined by the client's choice of clothing. As rule, portraits commissioned to mark a special celebration such as an anniversary or a graduation lend themselves to a more formal pose and attire, while casual clothing gives a more relaxed feel that is appropriate for informal groupings.

Timeless clothing
The clients' winter coats were the perfect choice to add a sense of nostalgia to this portrait. Minimal lighting makes the white background look gray; as a result, the faces have become the brightest point and the viewers' eyes are drawn to them, even though very little of the detail can be seen.

Formal clothing

If your subject is wearing a suit of clothes or a uniform, pay particular attention to the tie, cuffs, and jacket collar. For men, make sure the knot of the tie comes up to the collar and that the tie is not twisted or protruding below the jacket; the top button of the shirt should be fastened. The cuffs of the shirt are a classic touch and should be visible in order to separate the arm and the jacket sleeve.

Women often wear suits for formal portraits, but you need only pay attention to the cuff when a shirt is being worn with a jacket; for female formal portraits, pay more care to the line of the jacket around the bust and any gaping of the jacket—especially when no blouse is worn. A skirt will usually hang well of its own accord, except when the subject is seated; avoid any excess material being visible to the camera. If your subject is wearing a short skirt, make sure she turns her body slightly away from the camera for dignity.



Formal attire
When the subject is in formal clothing, you must abide by some of the unwritten rules of portraiture—especially the use of the cuff to separate the arm and jacket. The pose will drastically change the cut of the jacket and the way it hangs; the length of the sleeves makes some poses, such as crossing the arms, impossible.

Color of clothing and background

If the background is similar in tone to the subject's clothing, it can help to make them look thinner. This is why heavier people are often dressed in dark clothing and photographed against a dark background. White or

Thinning the subject
Dark clothing and a dark background help to make the subject look thinner.

tips

- If your subject is wearing a short-sleeved shirt under a jacket, try curling white paper around the wrist to look like a cuff.
- If possible, keep a spare set of cufflinks in case your client forgets to bring some—or improvize with a paper clip.
- Ask your subjects to bring at least two changes of clothing to the photo session—one formal, one relaxed.
- When you are photographing groups, suggest that everyone wears a similar style of clothing. At the very least, make sure that you don't have a mixture of formal and informal clothing.
- As a rule, a vertical stripe on fabric adds length to the portrait, giving the impression that your subject is taller, and hence thinner; a horizontal stripe has the reverse effect.
- Avoid logos on clothing if possible; not only do they distract the viewer's attention, but they can also very quickly make an image look unfashionable and out of date.

Glamorous necklines
Bare shoulders and plunging necklines look very glamorous. Heavy tops of the arms are not a problem for younger women; for older clients, however, this kind of clothing could be complemented by a thin layer of netting to simulate a shawl.

light clothing on a light background works in a similar way. I do, however, use dark clothing on a high-key set purely for dramatic effect at times.

Tone of clothing
If you are photographing two people, keep the clothing similar in tone, even if the colors are different. This will help with the overall tonality of the portrait and ensure that one of the subjects does not dominate because his or her clothing is lighter.

Sleeves

Sleeveless tops exaggerate the upper part of the arms and make them look bigger, due to the highlight and shadow caused by the lighting. Generally as we get older, the tops of the arms become more fleshy—but it astonishes me how many subjects still wear this type of clothing for a portrait.

If your subject is wearing a sleeveless top, it is a good idea to turn the body toward the key light so as to minimize the highlight on the fleshy arm and create more shadowing.

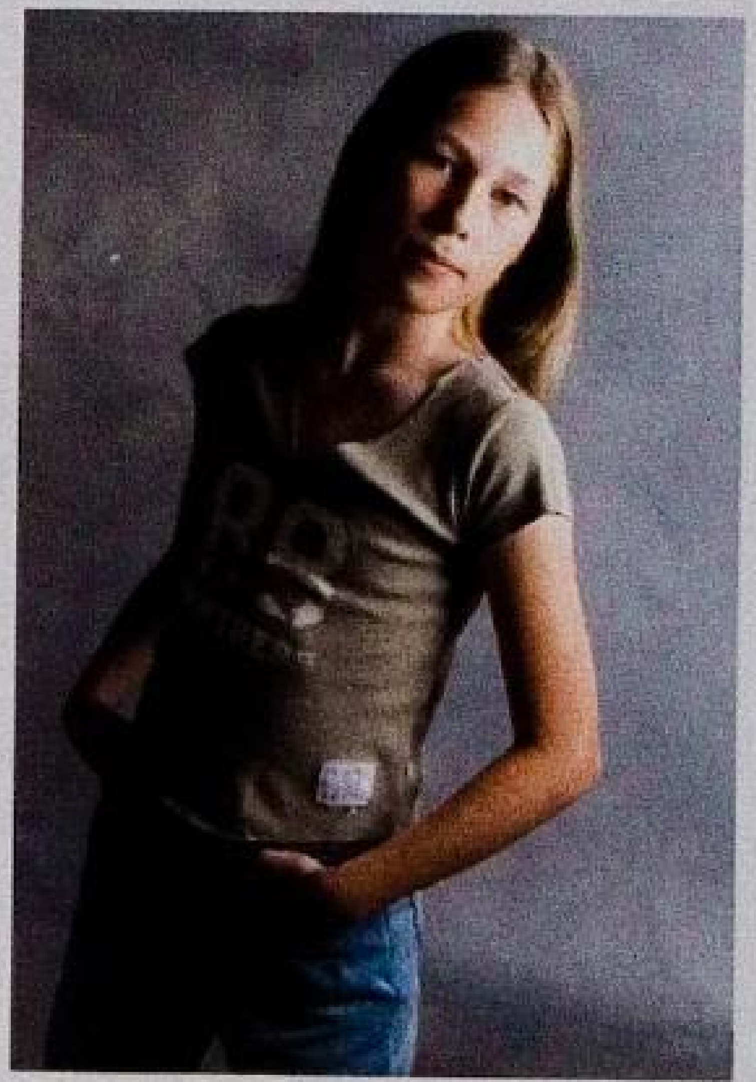
If your subject is wearing a top with sleeves, make sure the sleeves are not so long that they obscure the wrists and hands.

Neckline

For ladies the neckline of a dress, jacket, or blouse is a very important feature when purchasing clothing. A plunging neckline draws attention to the bust and is ideal for some women; the shoulders can be exaggerated by the use of an off-the-shoulder garment, which will also give a confident and glamorous look. A scoop neckline is ideal for women with a short neck, as it makes the neck look longer; conversely, a polo neck jumper makes the distance from the shoulders to the head seem shorter.

Casual or leisure clothing

Most of my portraiture is based around relaxed and informal images, so it is essential that the client keeps the selection of clothes simple so as not to date or detract from the portrait. For simplicity, you cannot beat jeans and a white T-shirt—for both children and adults.



Disguising the logo
Here the subject's body was turned away from the light to stop the key light from illuminating the white reflective logo on the T-shirt and help disguise the bright white highlights.

Using the logo for effect
I decided to use the picture on the T-shirt as a dominant part of the portrait. To add to the humor I used a wide-angle lens and a high viewpoint, which distorted the face and body.

Refining the Pose

By refining the details of a pose, you can make a portrait look far more relaxed. Being able to communicate what you want your clients to do is essential when making such subtle changes.

It is a good idea to build up a repertoire of posing positions. Not only will this help you with the composition and the way you frame the subject in the portrait, but it will also allow you to rely on a small variety of poses that you can achieve easily, making your subject feel confident in your ability and allowing you to be more creative during the rest of the session.

Seating the client

When a chair is used in a portrait, it is better for it to be off square to the camera, so that the subject can turn naturally. Many subjects tend to slouch: you can improve matters by asking them to sit toward the front of the chair, as this will keep their back a little straighter and make them look more alert. If the chair has arms, ask your subject to lean on the arm that is nearest the camera; this creates a look of interest and confidence. Leaning on the arm of the chair that is furthest from the camera can make the subject look withdrawn.

Seating your client on the floor looks natural

Awkward sitting pose
This portrait is a perfect example of why a pose needs to be refined: when the subject was asked to sit, she sat almost flat on her bottom, leaving her knees in an awkward and uncomfortable position. It looks posed and unnatural.

Refined sitting pose
Here, I asked the subject to roll her body toward the camera and rest on her hip to relax the pose. I also got her to cross her feet, which allowed the top knee to bend and slightly cover the bottom leg. Her left hand creates a gap between the arm and the body, which makes her look thinner, while her right arm supports her weight and adds to the shape and curve of the portrait.

Lying on the floor

These poses are ideal for children and young women, but not appropriate for a man.

Torso raised
The tilt of the head toward the key light makes the subject look relaxed, and the hands are positioned forward to balance the body as well as to help the composition. The hands could be brought back toward the chest, to shade them from the key light and make them less of a distraction.

Chin resting on hands
This pose makes the subject look slimmer; the amount of white background around her also helps to minimize her overall body size. When the chin rests on the hands, make sure it does not push down on the arm; this not only looks unnatural but will also fatten the face.

and gives him or her plenty of space. It is ideal for a full-length seated portrait. However, if it is not carefully controlled, this pose can make the subject look awkward and fatter.

Some people feel comfortable when lying on the floor, while others do not; you need to exercise a little common sense, as well as courtesy, when deciding what a client will and will not do. When your subject is lying on the floor, make sure that features such as the buttocks or bust are not overexaggerated.

Fun posing
Never be afraid to use a prop completely out of character as it can add a fun and quirky element to the portrait. Here, the subject looks too big for the chair; a child in the same pose would look more natural in scale.

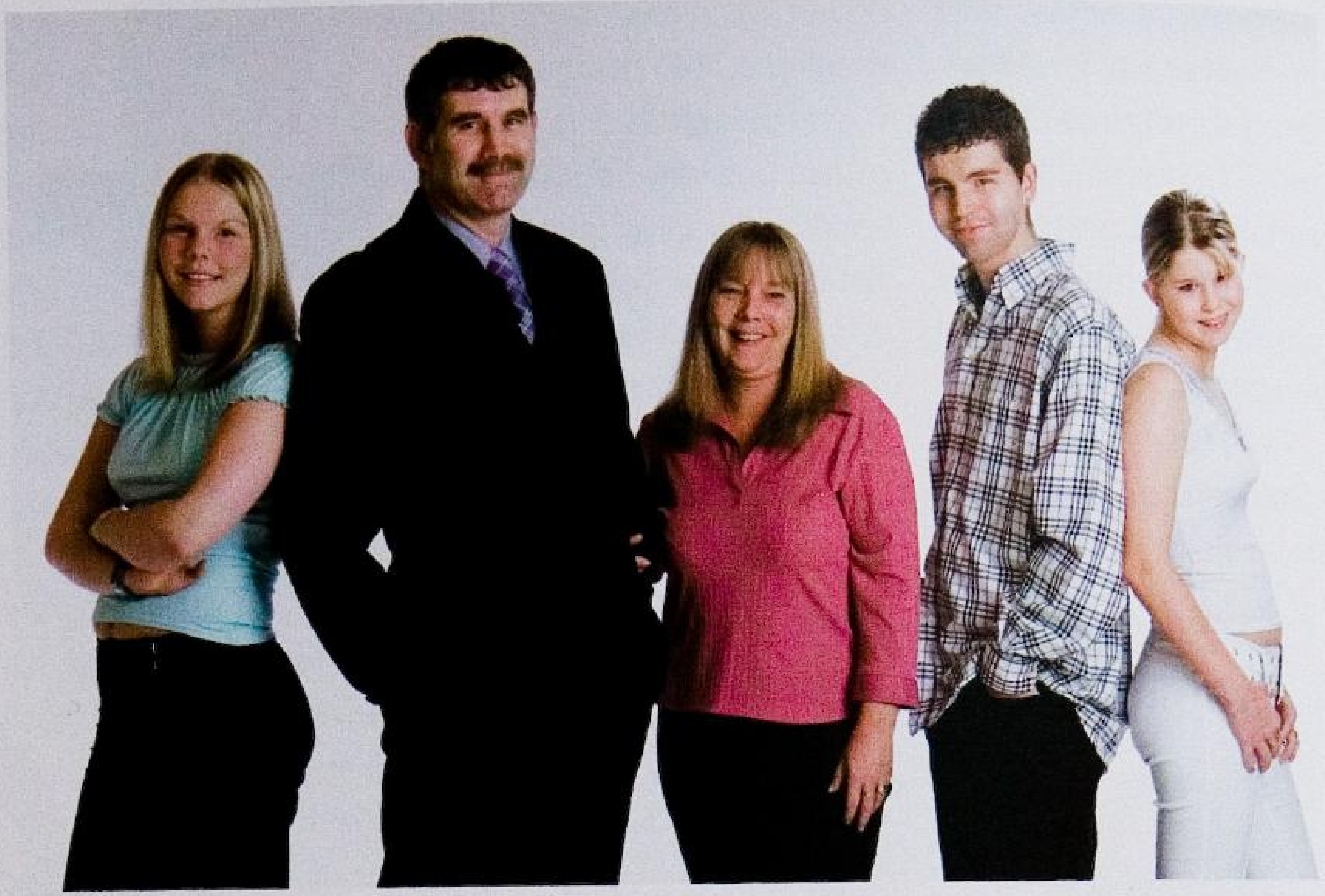
Seated huddle
This portrait is perfect for women with the appropriate clothing as it exaggerates the slimness of the waist and, because both knees are bent, makes the legs look longer. Turning the body slightly away from the light exaggerates the highlight on the face and side arm and directs attention toward the face.

Refined huddle
Bringing all the limbs together gives a new mood to the portrait, as it now becomes very insular and secure. This pose exaggerates the use of arms to weave all the body parts together and lends a beautiful shape to the portrait.

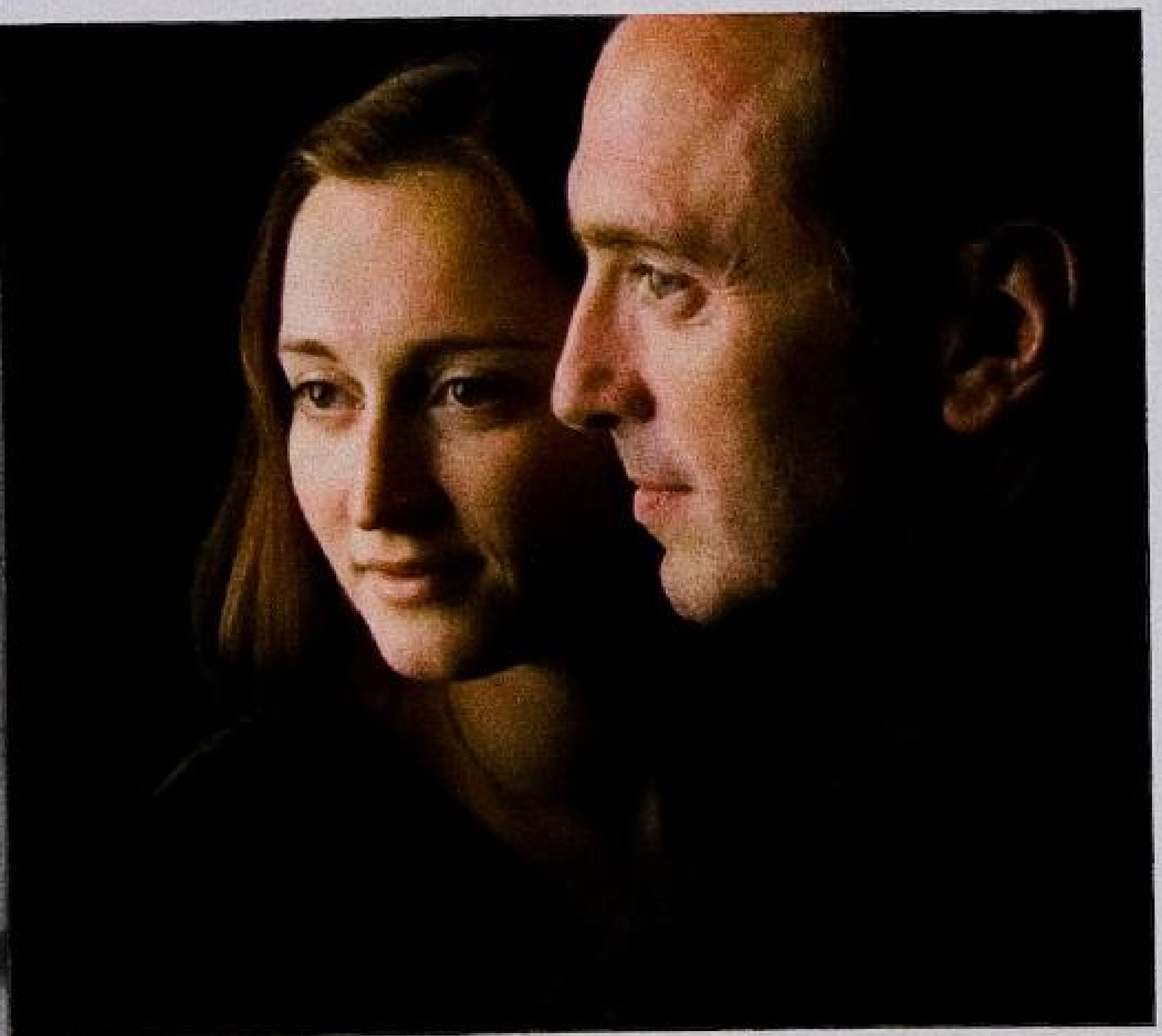
Using a chair
This portrait shows a classic seated pose, with the subject's weight on her front hip and the front foot hooked behind the other to take it away from the camera and make it look less prominent. The hand nestles comfortably across the lap and bends slightly upward (see page 29). Resting one arm on the chair back is a rather more contemporary style of posing; here, however, it distracts a little from the face, as the back of the hand is visible and looks large and catches the light too much.

Exploring Relationships

Many of the subjects you encounter will be either families or groups of friends. The ability to understand and interpret the relationships in a portrait of more than one person relies on your observation skills as well as on you being able to communicate with your subjects.



The family
The fun of posing families is working out how to combine people of different heights and sexes. Here the mother takes center stage, with her husband and son on either side to add strength to the composition, while the daughters at either end hold the group together.



Classic couple
Even though the subjects are physically close to one other, it is purely their expression and the way that their heads are tilted toward one another that makes it clear that they are a couple. This is enhanced by the romantic lighting.

Couples

The style of the portrait depends on the relationship between the couple. An engaged or married couple will usually be more passionately animated and can be posed very close together, so that they can lean their heads toward each other. A brother-and-sister portrait, on the other hand, would not be as closely posed and very rarely would any hands be placed on the other person—except, perhaps, for a hand on the shoulder in a tightly framed head-and-shoulders portrait.

Family groups

Depending on the relationships between them, posing a family can be the simplest of tasks or your worst nightmare. The secret is to observe them carefully before you even begin to put the family group together and to separate those who do not appear to get on right at the start. In this kind of situation, make the session as quick as you can, minimizing on fuss of lighting.

The focus of any family group is usually the parents, so traditionally they take center stage, with their children radiating out from them by age.

There are, however, always exceptions to this rule—the main ones being the style of the portrait and the need to hide one person behind another to reduce body size. Generally, turn each member of the group so that their shoulders face toward the middle of the portrait, with the heads tilting slightly toward the center of the group; this has a slight slimming effect, and also allows the bodies to be positioned close together.

Parent and child

Probably the most emotional of all relationships in portraiture is that between a parent and child—especially a newborn child. The natural bond between them makes for great photographs, as the interactions and instinctive glances that occur are ones that words will never be able to explain. When I photograph a parent and child, I use the touching of hands and arms and feet as the connection between the subjects to add to the mood of the portrait.

The secret is to keep things simple and allow the expressions to tell the story. It is best to try and work on the same level as a child, so as not to

Mother and child
This loving portrait of a mother and child is full of emotion. The mother has been brought down to the child's level; I simply photographed the interaction between the two.

Degrees of closeness
Physical proximity reveals your subjects' emotional rapport.

Friend or foe?
The pose of this portrait does not tell us much about the relationship between the three subjects, except for the fact that, because their bodies are touching, there is evidently some closeness.

Friends or family
The relaxed, smiling expressions make it clear that there is a close relationship between the members of this group, although it is not clear whether they are family or just friends.

Twins
When I photograph twins, I try and give each one something different to do in the portrait. The young boy was asked to sit with his back to his sister and (probably because he thought he was being ignored) he began to interact.

look down on them, so getting down on the floor is essential for a true child's eye view. Young children will always feel more comfortable on the floor, with or without a parent.

Children

A session with a very young child can be over in minutes, so be ready to take the portrait, instead of fussing with equipment. I always work with the parent or a guardian in the studio. This helps the child to relax and allows me to concentrate on taking the photographs rather than worrying about the child's safety.

For more animated poses I encourage children to move around the studio a little while they are being photographed. If you can make it seem like a game, this is a great way of bringing out their natural character.

To get the interaction between siblings can be easy, if they get on, or a testing experience if they hate each other. Start a session with the children close to each other, but not touching; you can usually tell from this how well they get on and this will determine the variety of poses to follow.

Runaway kids
After exploring the relationship between the children during the main part of the session, I always try to end with some fun images. It took six attempts to get this shot right!

Arranging your Subject within the Frame

The same general guidelines on composition apply to portraiture just as much as they do to still lifes and landscapes. The rules of composition are based on tried-and-tested formulas from the art world, improved and refined over the centuries.

The rules of composition

It is not easy to define what makes an effective composition, but there are certain basic rules about the way you divide the picture area to give a pleasing strength and balance. For example, by splitting up the image into three equal sections, both vertically and horizontally, we end up with lines of composition known as the "thirds". When a subject is placed on one of these dividing lines, the shot tends to have a pleasing balance or dynamic.

The most common shape of composition in a portrait is that of a triangle. This is easy to see in an individual portrait, with the head being the peak and the width of the body being the base. The triangular composition is perfect for groups, with the higher subject in the middle of the portrait leading out to the other subjects to the sides. There are other shapes seen in portraits, too: the C, V, T, L, and S shapes are all used in day-to-day posing.

As a guide, a head-and-shoulders portrait should be cropped just above the bust, to fill the frame comfortably, with space above and to one side of the subject to give balance in composition. A three-quarters portrait should be cropped halfway through the thigh, again with more space above and to one side of the subject. A full-length portrait should have more background on one side of the subject than on the other, and more space above than below.

The eyes

A portrait will be improved in composition by tilting the head slightly, to shift the eyes from a horizontal position and set them at an angle. When you are photographing a group, avoid placing everyone's eyes at the same height and angle.

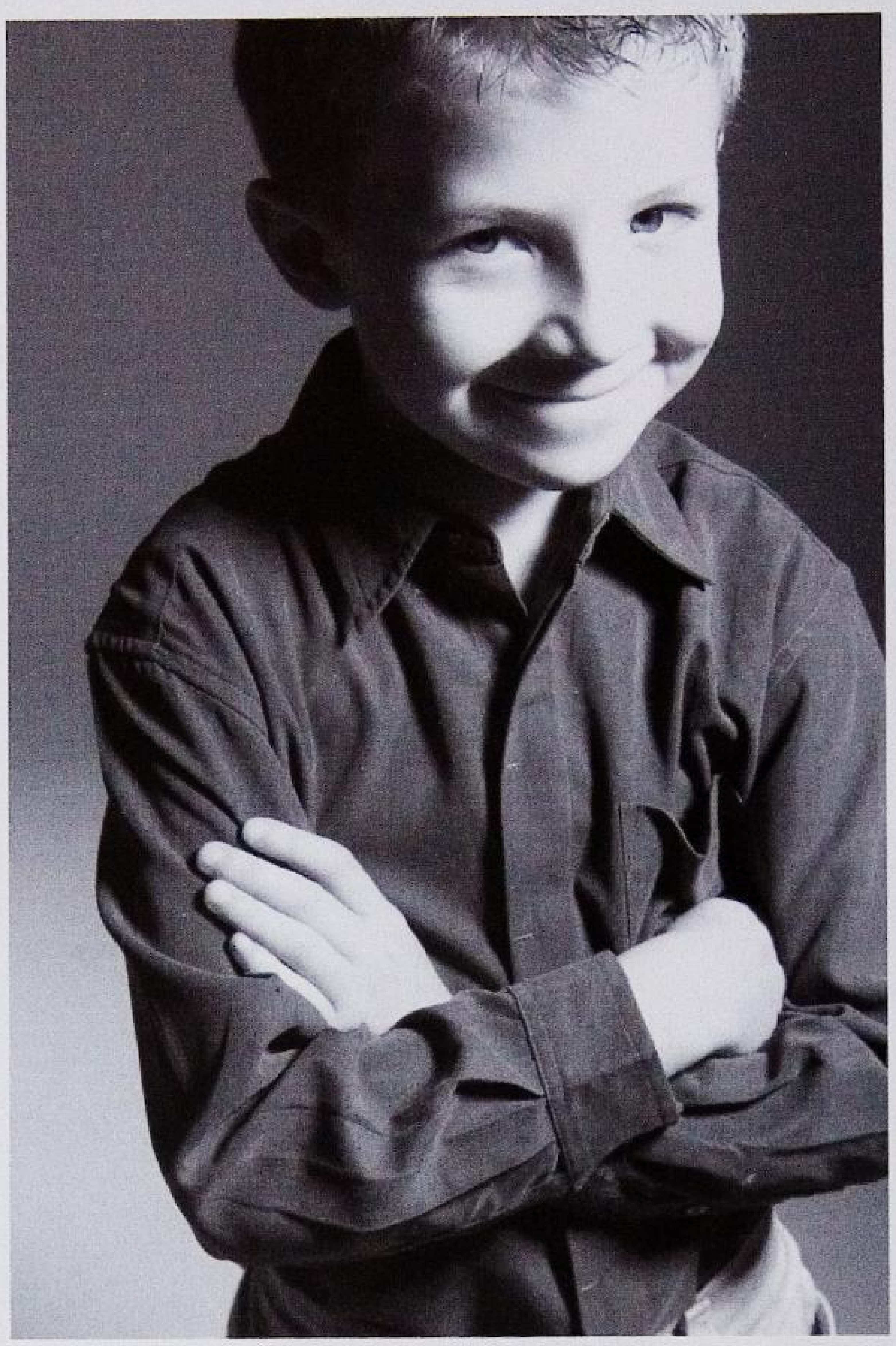
Breaking the rules

Breaking the "rules" often gives more dynamic and symbolic images. Cropping through the forehead, for example, not only tightens the composition but also brings more impact to the portrait. Placing the subject facing the edge of the frame, with a large amount of space behind, breaks most basic rules of composition as the portrait feels unbalanced and the subject looks as if he or she is about to fall out of the frame—but it can be a very useful technique way of increasing drama within the portrait.

Triangular composition
This simple portrait relies on a triangular composition for its strength. The triangle shape starts from the top of the heads (an invisible point) and goes out to each side toward the feet. The pose is balanced by having the correct amount of space top and bottom.

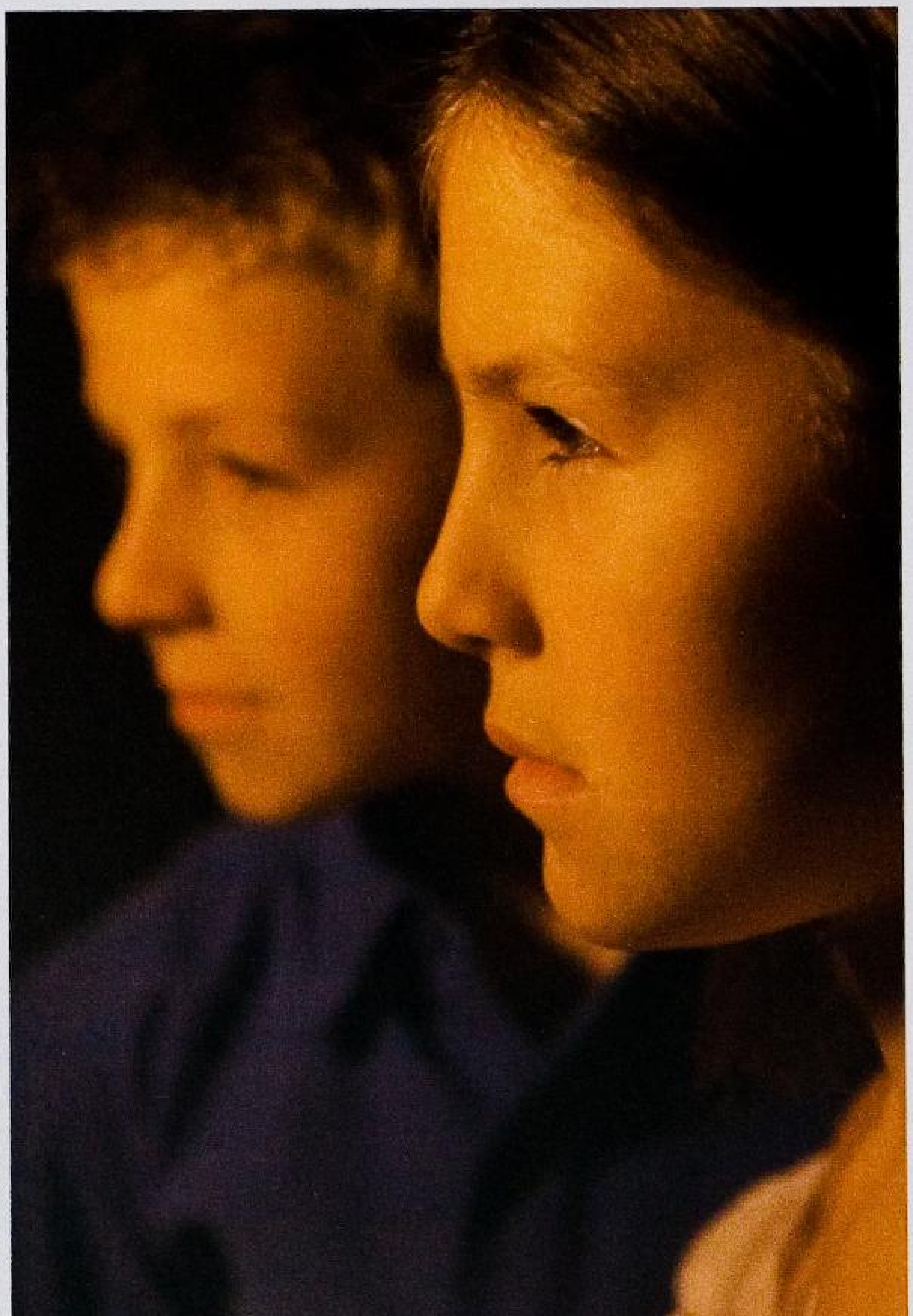
Capturing expression
I used a high-key set-up for this family portrait to give a simple and graphic shape; this allows the expressions to dominate the portrait, with no distraction from props or background.

Close cropping
Close cropping loses any distracting highlights on the skin—especially when hard lighting, which creates more highlight and shadow, is used. For this shot, I used a slightly higher viewpoint than normal.



Deliberate distortion
Here, I used a wide-angle lens from close to the subject, to exaggerate the body size slightly and give a quirky angle and crop. The crossed arms add a feeling of a cheeky defiance, which was enhanced by the boy's expression.

On the thirds
Once again, the subject has been offset to one side to add to the drama. Her face is turned away from the key light and just far enough toward the camera to allow her to look directly into the camera lens without discomfort. The cropping of the head places the eyes on the third, which adds to the strength of the composition.



Split focus
I use split focusing a lot in portraiture. Here, the girl was positioned close to the camera and in profile, to give a strong dynamic focus to the portrait. Her brother was positioned further away so that he was slightly out of focus; the key light was positioned close to him and angled toward the girl, which increased the shadow on both subjects' faces.

Viewpoint

The angle and position from which you shoot have a profound effect on the final image. Explore different viewpoints, to bring more variety into your shots.

Changing your normal shooting angle will open your eyes to new ideas and trends, as well as making the session more fun for both you and your subjects.

We're often advised to photograph children from a low camera angle—both to avoid any distortion and to show the surroundings from the children's perspective. Another advantage of doing this is that, if the children are lying on the ground, shooting from their eye level allows you to show just the heads, hiding the bodies behind from view.

High camera angles are often an effective and contemporary-looking way of photographing groups: some distortion can occur, which you can exploit for creative effect, and it minimizes the amount of background in the shot, allowing you to concentrate on the faces.

Finally, don't forget that you can shoot from the side, as well as straight on. This often makes for a much more interesting composition—particularly when you're photographing a group, as you can create lines that lead the viewer's eye through the picture.

Birds'-eye view
Shooting my subjects from a ladder is a viewpoint I really enjoy, even though a little distortion occurs. Because of the extreme differences in height, from the shortest child on the floor to the child elevated close to the camera, I had to control the depth of field carefully. I focused on the father's face and used an aperture of f/8 to keep everyone in focus.

Leading the eye
This was shot from a high camera angle, with the subjects positioned one behind the other in a line. Note how the turn of the shoulders creates a natural zig-zag that takes the viewer's eye along the line.

▲ **Reaching for the stars**
This portrait consists of two main elements—the wild and animated children and the carefully posed parents. The camera was set up around the parents' chest level and, once the parents had been positioned and posed, the children were asked to reach for the stars and jump as high as they could. Needless to say, it took several attempts to get them all in the right place at the same time.

◀ **Exaggerated perspective**
Using an extreme wide-angle lens (equivalent to an 18mm on an SLR), the subjects were positioned as close to the camera as possible to exaggerate perspective. Even though they are slightly distorted, the overall effect is of a powerful and fun image. The subjects were placed so as to give a triangular or pyramid shape to the overall group, to give some balance to the image.

◀ **Individuals within the group**
For the individual portraits of this family I decided to use the other family members as foreground and background. I moved the camera to shoot from the chest height of the second child. The family members were then carefully positioned to give a clear view of the main subject—the young girl, who was the only one looking directly at the camera.

Shooting a Series

During most sessions, I shoot a series of images that will work as a group as well as each image being able to stand alone.

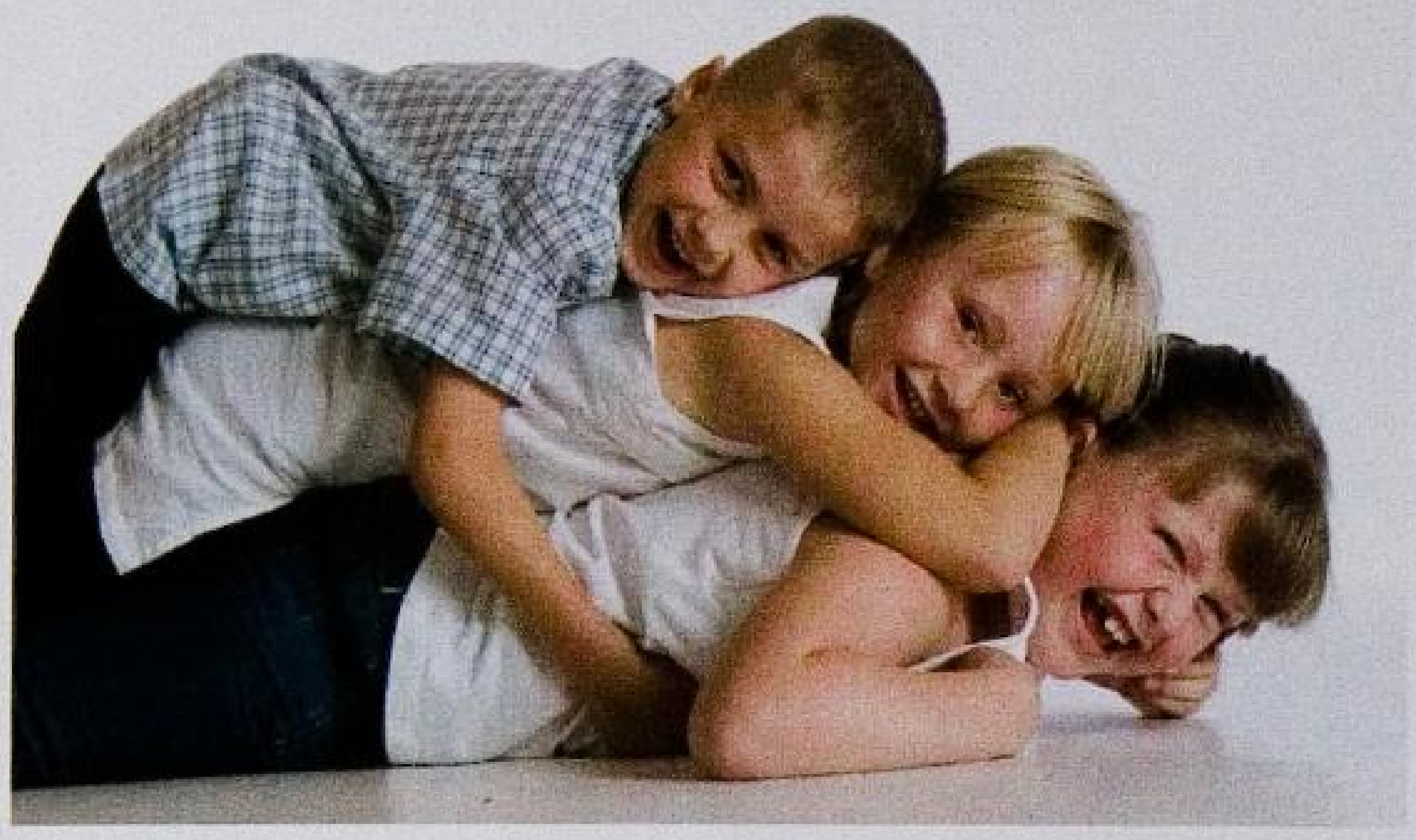
Many of my clients choose to hang the series of images, as it adds to the impact especially when they are large images on the wall. Even if you're not a professional portrait photographer, however, trying to shoot a series is a useful discipline, as it forces you to think about what you're doing rather than simply shooting individual frames. The images on these two pages were all taken in one session.

Looking away
The children were asked to stand in a line with their backs to me, ranged in height from tallest to shortest, with their feet touching in order to maintain a grouping.

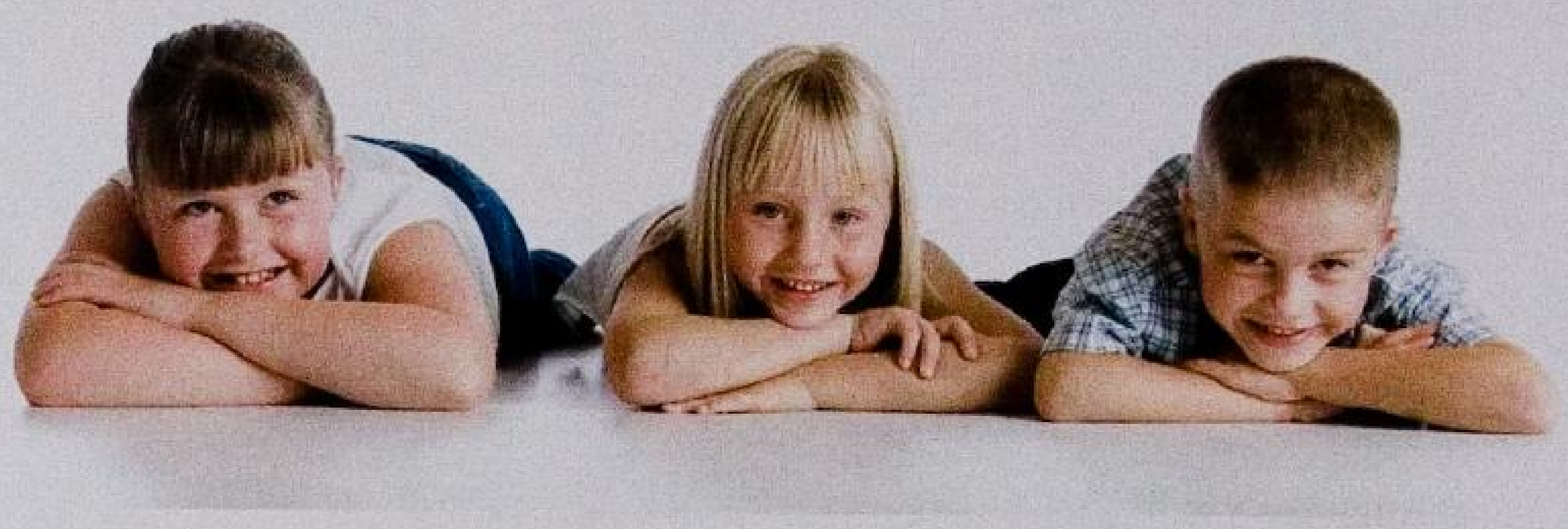
Looking at camera
On cue they twisted to look at camera. I took several images to guarantee capturing their expressions.

Through the legs
As well as being great fun for the children, this is an image that will bring a smile to anyone's face.

Fun finish
I usually promise the children that I'll end with a fun shot, as this keeps their attention and eagerness to perform right to the last. It is important to stress the dangers, but as with all children they have no fear and are eager to oblige. The first portraits in this series would be the children sitting along the back of the sofa ready to fly; they are then instructed which way to exit the sofa—left, right, backward, or forward. I always take several frames to be sure of getting the best shot.



Pyramid
This portrait is always painful for the child at the bottom of the pile, so speed is of the essence.



Panoramic
Here the children were asked to lie on the floor with their arms crossed. It is important to position them as close to each other as possible to maintain the connection in the pose. The very low camera angle loses most of the body bulk.

Square
With a bird's-eye view from a ladder the children are posed with their heads close together and spread out to give space between their bodies. This pose can be done with up to five children to maintain the square cropping; any more than five, and the portrait becomes just a lump of flesh.

Trouble Shooting

No matter how perfect your client may look, there will almost always be something about their appearance that they hate. Many such features are obvious; but some are not.

The golden rule is that if you notice it, it's probably something that they worry about—so the first thing to do is work out how to disguise or minimize the offending feature.

Bald head

To loose the shine on a bald head, you need to reduce the hardness of any light hitting the surface. A simple solution is to switch off the hair light, which would naturally cause a highlight and hot spot; instead, use a soft box for a low-key style of portrait.

If the problem persists, the highlight is coming from another light source. Use some black card or a subtraction panel to block the source of the reflection. This can cause a slight shadowing on the top of the head.

Eyeglasses

To get rid of or minimize the reflection in glasses, position the key light slightly higher than normal while still keeping a catchlight in the eye.

You can also ask your subject to push the arms of the glasses up above the ears a little, so that the lenses point slightly downward. This changes the angle of the lenses in relation to the light source and can go a long way toward getting rid of unwanted reflections—but be careful not to push the spectacles up too far, as it will look unnatural.

Double chins

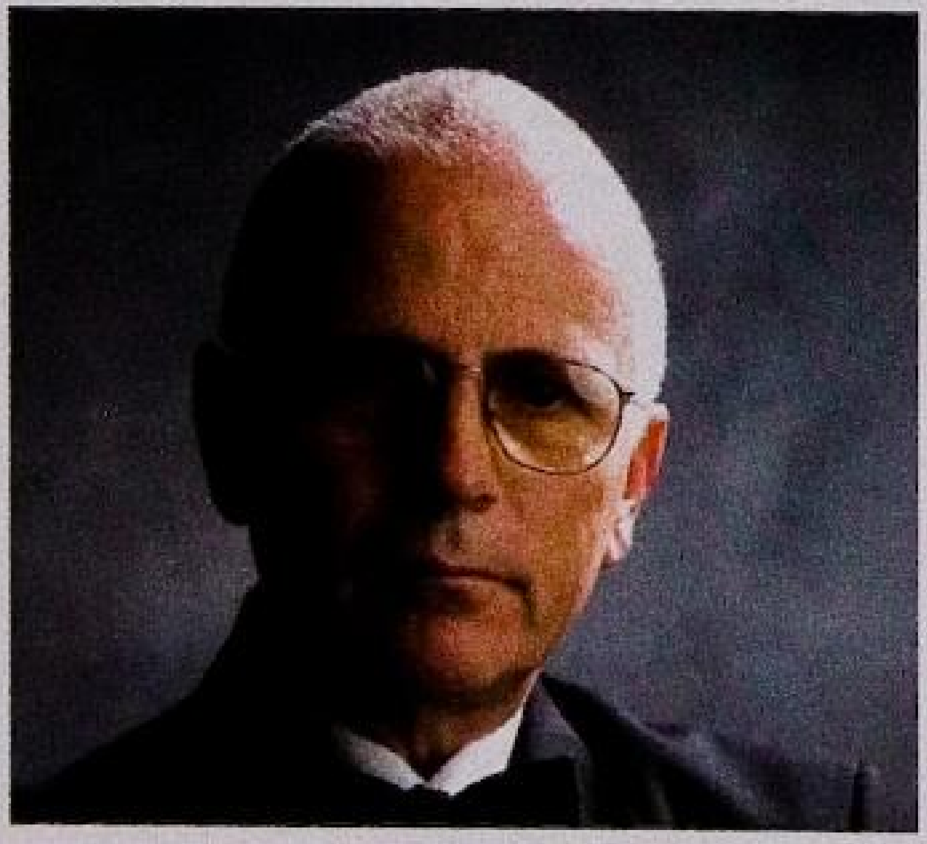
The easiest way to get over the problem of a fatty neck and double chins is to shoot from a higher camera position and ask your subject to look up a little. This lifts the chin and stretches the neck. You can improve things even more by getting your subject to rest their elbows on a slightly lower table and lean on their hands.

Squint

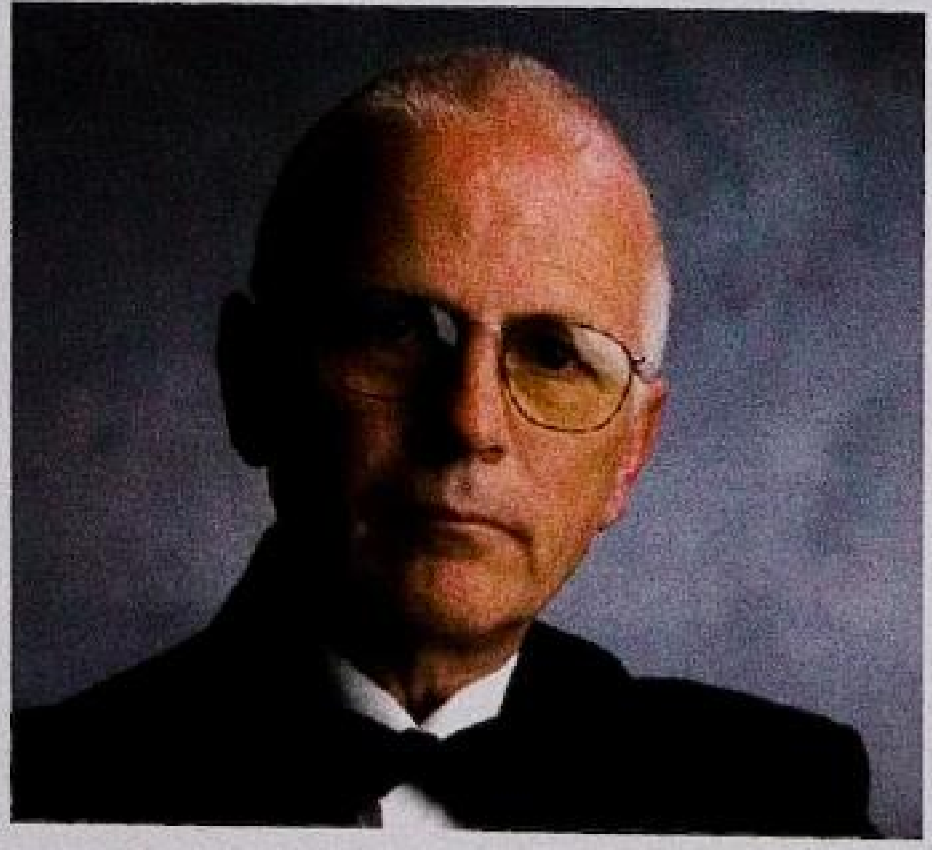
Squints can be caused by either a natural facial characteristic or by the bright light of either the sun or a modeling bulb.

tips

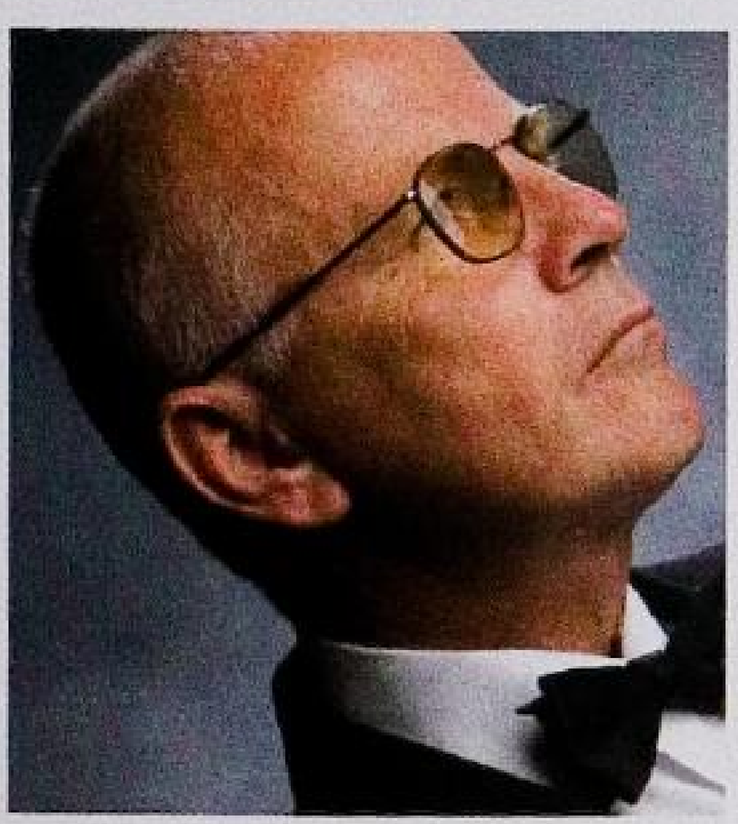
- ✦ If your subject is wearing glasses whose lenses darken in response to light, use a dark studio environment with the modeling lamps set to minimum so that the lenses do not darken.
- ✦ To minimize reflections in glasses, move the arm of the glasses slightly above the natural ear position to change the angle of the glass.



Distracting highlights
When the subject has little or no hair, light coming from behind will overlight the shiny surface of the head, causing distracting highlights. Remember also that a light from behind will appear twice as bright as one in front of the subject.

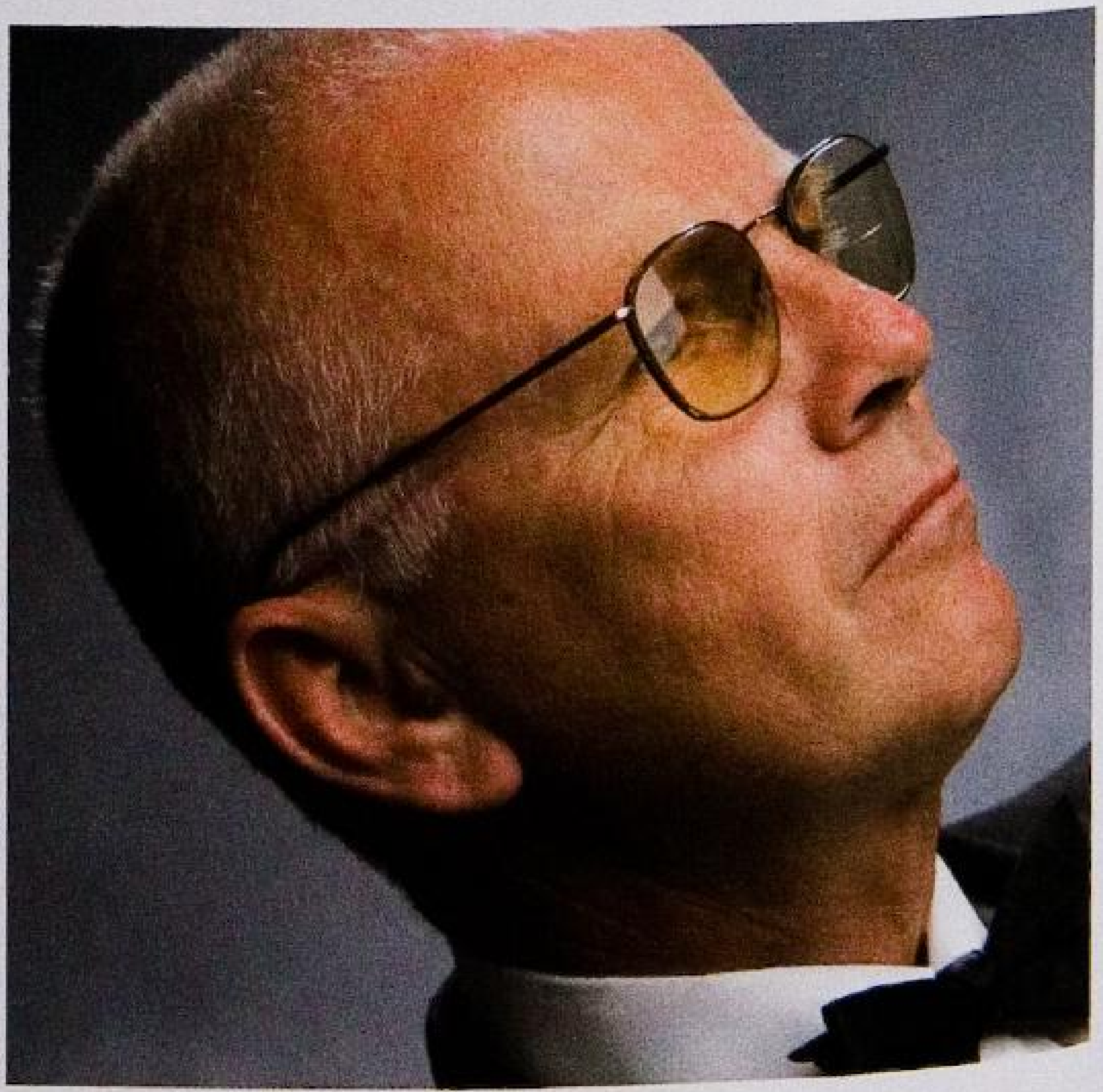


Diffuse or lose the highlight
To minimize any light falling onto the subject from behind, switch off the hair light or, if you are on location, position a diffusion reflector panel between the sun and the subject. In very sunny conditions, find shade or use a portable flash on the face to give at least two stops more than the ambient light.



◀ Natural spectacle position
This shot shows the natural glasses arm position on the ear.

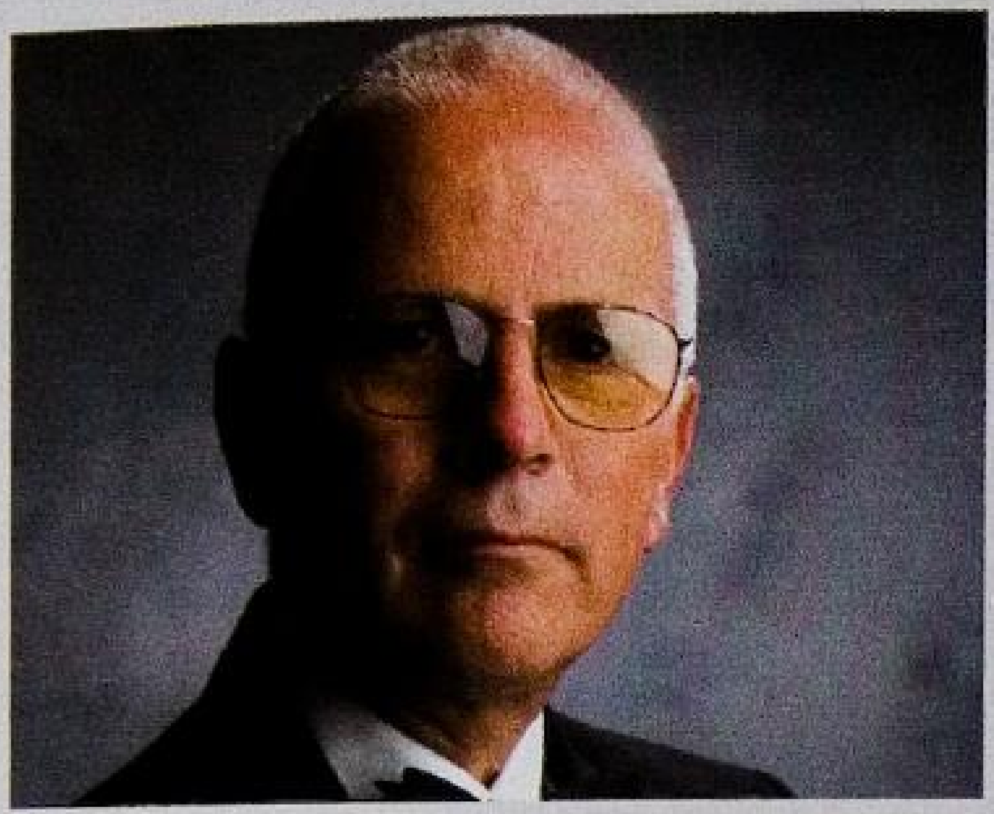
▼ Elevated arms
Moving the arm of the glasses slightly upward changes the angle of the lenses, reducing the amount of reflection.



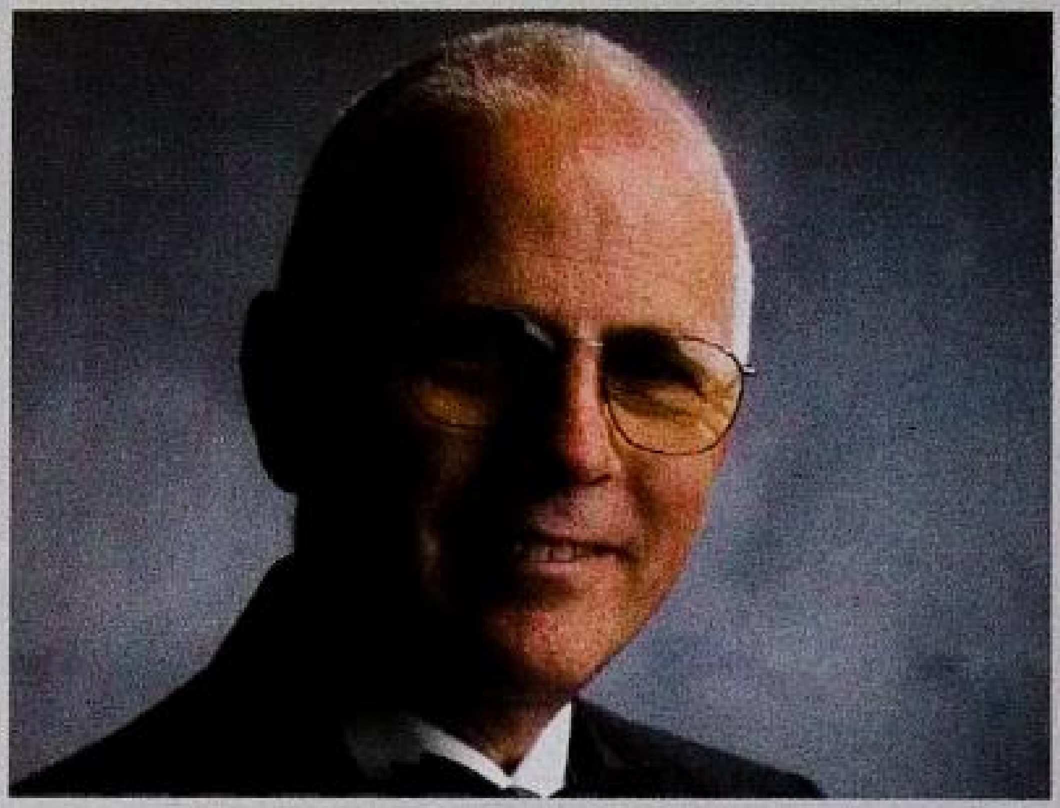
Reflection in Eyeglasses

One of the biggest headaches for a portrait photographer is the key light being reflected in the subject's glasses. You can minimize this by repositioning the key light, moving it in an arc around the subject until the reflection is sufficiently reduced. However, this does change the lighting pattern.

Large amount of reflection
When the key light is fitted with a soft box and positioned close to the camera, a large amount of light is reflected in the glasses.



Medium amount of reflection
When the key light is repositioned to at 45° to the subject, the reflection is at an acceptable level for most portraits.



Little reflection
When the key light is repositioned slightly higher and further away from the camera, the reflection is reduced. There is, however, less shadow detail.

A natural squint can be minimized by asking your subject to lower his or her chin or by raising the camera so that the subject is forced to gaze upward, thus opening the eyes wider.

If bright lights (either in the studio or on location) are making your subject squint, try to make the lighting as even as possible. Turn down the modeling bulb to match the ambient room light if you are using studio flash, especially on the key light.

Unevenly sized or "sleepy" eyes

Many people have one eye that is slightly bigger than the other. To get around the problem, ask your subject to adopt a two-thirds pose, with the eye that is smallest closer to the camera; the perspective exaggerates the size of the smaller eye a little and makes the two eyes look more even in size.

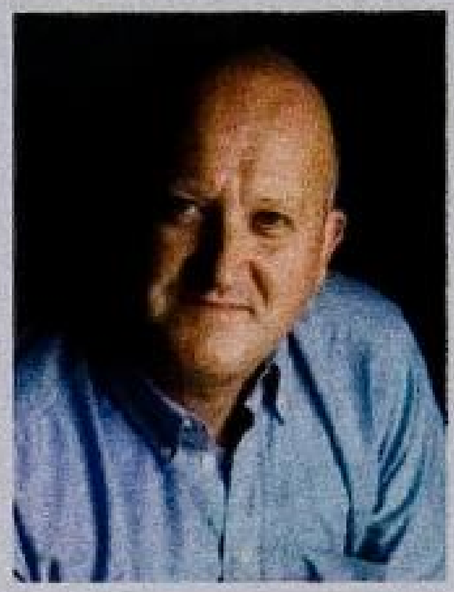
A sleepy eye is more difficult, as the eyelid will always look half closed. It is better for the side of the face with the sleepy eye to be furthest from the camera, and to shoot from slightly higher than normal. If this fails to solve the problem, put the side of the face with the sleepy eye in shadow.

Simple solutions

Overweight subjects can easily be made to look a little slimmer.

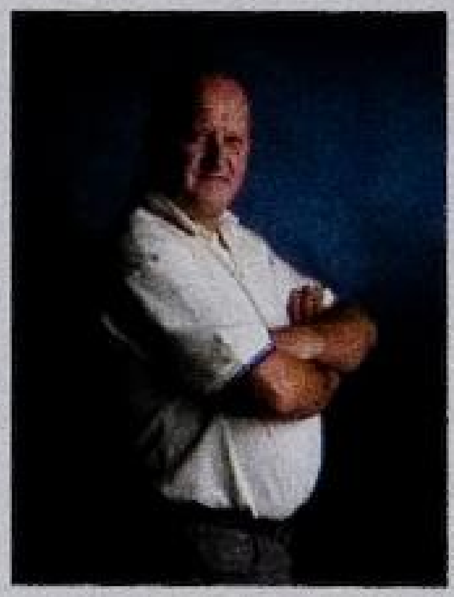
Double chins
Photographing a subject with "double chins" from a low camera angle exaggerates the folds of skin on the neck.

Stretching the neck
Shooting from a higher angle and getting the subject to look up makes the neck look longer.



Slimming the subject
By turning the subject at a slight angle to the camera a slimming of the body occurs.

Exaggerating the body
Avoid profile shots of the body, as this exaggerates the body size.

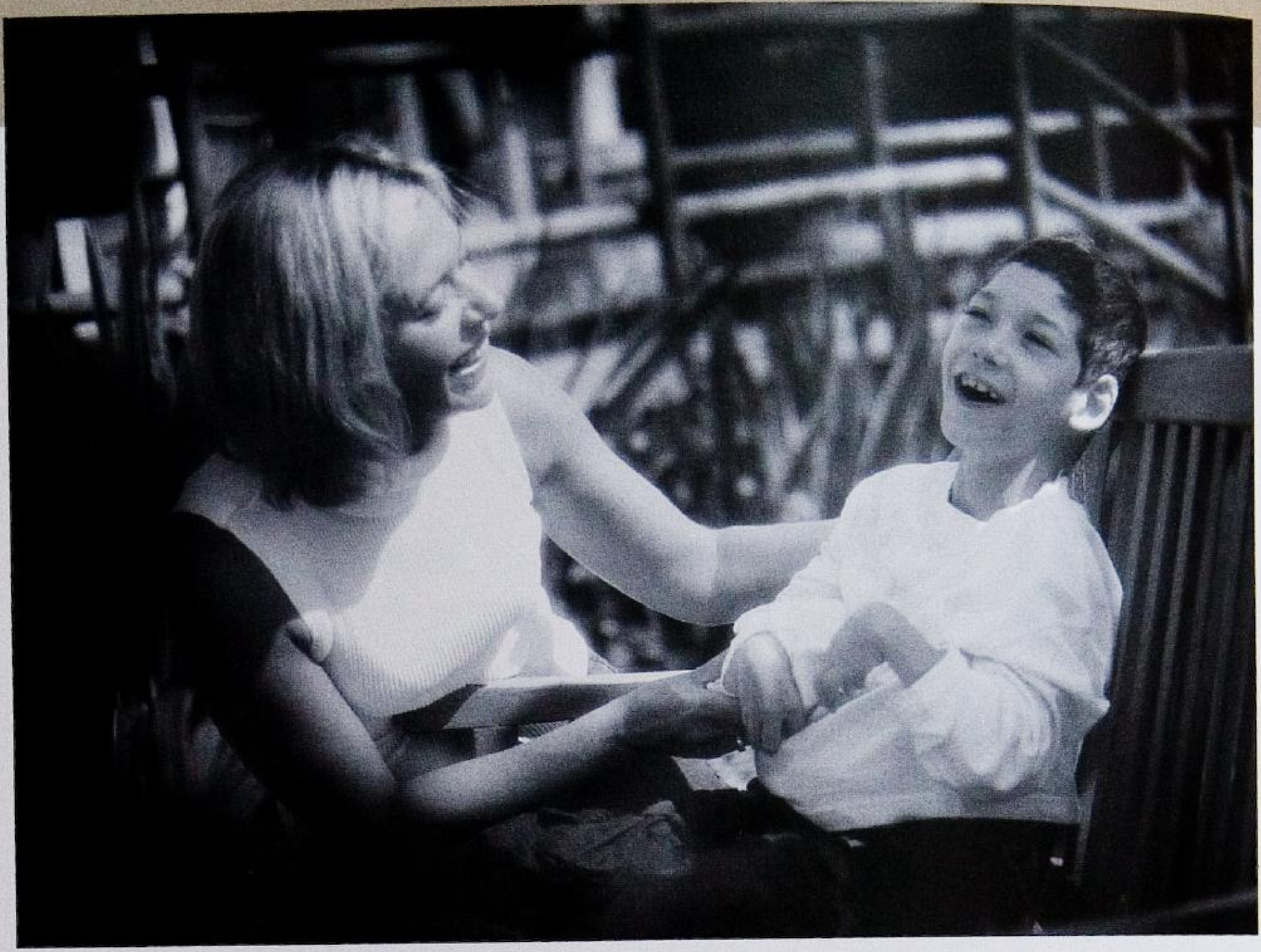


tips

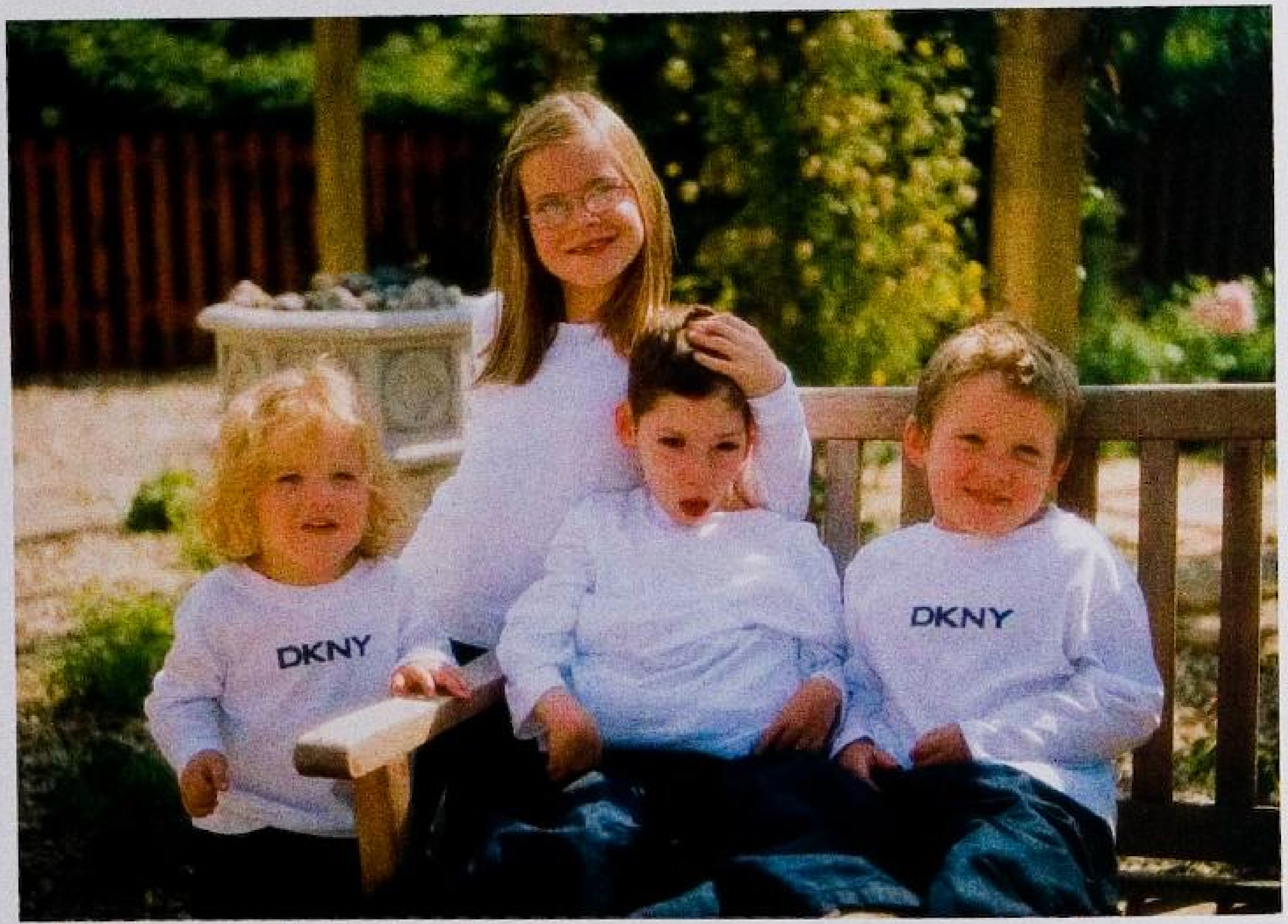
- ✦ If your subject has a double chin, shoot from a higher camera position.
- ✦ For overweight subjects, use low-key lighting to increase the amount of shadow in the portrait and give a natural slimming effect.
- ✦ If one person in the portrait is heavier than another, disguise some of the body bulk by positioning the slighter subject in front.
- ✦ Always turn the body at a slight angle to the camera to reduce the size of your subject.

Weight

Very few of us are exactly the weight we should be, so you must know how to disguise your subjects' natural shape and make them look slimmer. The simplest way is to use shadow creatively, by using the narrow lighting technique (see page 50) or a harder light source. Another method is to place something between the camera and the subject: this can be another member of the group or an object such as a plant on a table. Remember that your choice of camera angle can also change the illusion of the body size.



▲ Mother and child
The wheelchair was replaced with a garden bench—a natural prop, which allows mother and child to interact with one other.



◀ Keeping it simple
The elder girl was able to support her brother's head with her hand to give a natural-looking portrait. The portrait was lit by reflected light from the sun, using a sunfire reflector panel in front of the camera to give an overall soft light. The sunlight from behind was used as a natural hair and rim light.

Disabilities

You must always show respect to your subjects, and never is this more true than when you are photographing physically disabled and mentally disabled people. Wheelchair-bound subjects will either want to be photographed in their wheelchair or prefer a more natural relaxed seat; if they prefer to be in their wheelchair, make sure the chrome on the chair does not dominate the image.

If someone has a mental disability, facial or hand gestures are often exaggerated and the pose cannot be completely controlled. Make sure you do not to exaggerate any shadows, and use a fast shutter speed at times to freeze any animation and exaggerated limb gestures.

Big ears

Covering the ears with the hair is a natural solution to this problem, as is lighting the portrait to give an overall mid-key result so that the ears are not silhouetted against the background. A two-thirds or three-quarter face shot, with narrow or split lighting (see pages 50 and 56), is ideal. You should also turn off the hair light so as not to draw any extra attention to the ears. If someone has ears that are different sizes, put the larger ear in shadow with the smallest ear facing toward the camera.

Big nose

Nose shapes will always be exaggerated by the harshness of a shadow so use a soft light source, such as a large soft box positioned near the camera, to give a flatter lighting effect and less shadow. Move the light around while you are assessing the face to try and minimize the shape and shadow of the nose.

If you shoot a three-quarter face portrait, make sure the nose does not cut through the far cheek. Never shoot a profile of someone with a big nose unless he or she specifically requests it.

Height differences

When you are photographing two or more people of very different heights, the simplest way to disguise the difference between them is to seat the taller subjects. Never ask a short adult to stand on a raiser or a box.

Special babies
From time to time I am asked to photograph a special baby who, for medical reasons may not survive, making their portraits irreplaceable. Baby Jasmine was first placed on a bean bag covered in white silk; this is perfect for babies—especially for those who are not very well, as it means that the baby does not need to be handled and hence get distressed during the session. Jasmine's head was turned slightly away from the camera in order to make the tube in her nose less dominant in the shot. The key light was positioned at almost 45° to give a lovely soft overall light, creating a slight shadowing on the near side of the face which is naturally filled from the reflectancy of the cloth. The light position was essential not only to light Jasmine, but also to make it easy to remove the tube using PhotoShop in post production.

Posing around the baby
Other members of the family were posed around Jasmine, leaning on the bean bag. The key light was positioned close to the camera to give an overall soft light. The expressions are the key to this shot—particularly the eye contact between Jasmine and her mother.

Differences in height

Extreme differences in height can seem more obvious in a photographic portrait than they do in real life, but there are some simple ways of minimizing or disguising the differences.

◀ Natural height differences
One way to minimize a difference in height is to get the taller person to lean against a wall. Provided the shorter person stands up straight, this will naturally lose 5–6 inches (12–15 cm).

▼ Reducing the difference
To reduce the height difference even more, ask the taller person to sit.

▲ Close crop
When the taller subject is seated, it is easier to pose the two people closer together. With creative cropping and composition, the height differences become less obvious.

3 Studio Lighting Made Simple

This chapter explains in detail the lighting techniques that you need to know in order to create great, professional-looking portraits. It is intended to give you an insight into why and how light should be applied to a portrait to achieve both classic and contemporary-style images. Once you have grasped this, anything is possible: no longer will you be confused when using your studio flash and accessories.

45° Lighting

The aim of most studio lighting is to replicate the kind of effect that you would get with natural daylight—soft, directional light that gives shape and form to your subject. The most commonly used type of lighting is 45° lighting. It is the starting point for many other kinds of look in portraiture, so mastering it will set you well on the road to becoming competent in studio lighting.

The 45° lighting set-up is easy to achieve and is based around using four lights—fill, key, hair, and background. Each of these lights plays a specific role in creating the final shot, so let's look at each one in turn.

Fill light

This is the first light to set up, and the only light to illuminate the shadow areas. It should cast no distinct shadows and should not be evident in the final photograph.

Position the fill light behind the camera and set it to 1–1½ stops less than the key-light setting (in this case, f4.5), giving a light ratio of 3:1. This is enough to hold detail in the shadows without affecting the contrast of the key light in the highlights. Attach a very large soft box to diffuse the light source and provide a wash of light across the subject. Take an incident light meter reading at the light source and adjust it to give a flash meter reading of f/4.5.

Key light

The key light shapes the subject, so you need to diffuse the light source to give a soft, natural look. Fit the key light with a large soft box, keeping the key light as close to the subject as possible. The soft box will diffuse the light and allow you greater control over the contrast. As a rough guide, you should set the key light high enough for it to be reflected in the top of the subject's eyes.

When the key light is at the correct height for both the subject and the camera position, place it at 45° to the subject's nose. The key light must remain at this angle at all times—so if the subject moves his or her head to look away from the camera, for instance, you must remember to move the key light to maintain the 45° position. I always set the key light at f/8, as I find this gives enough depth of field to keep the sitter sharp from front to back while allowing the background to go slightly out of focus.

Hair light

The hair light's job is to create a natural-looking separation between the

The complete 45° lighting set-up gives a portrait that will suit almost anybody of any age or size.

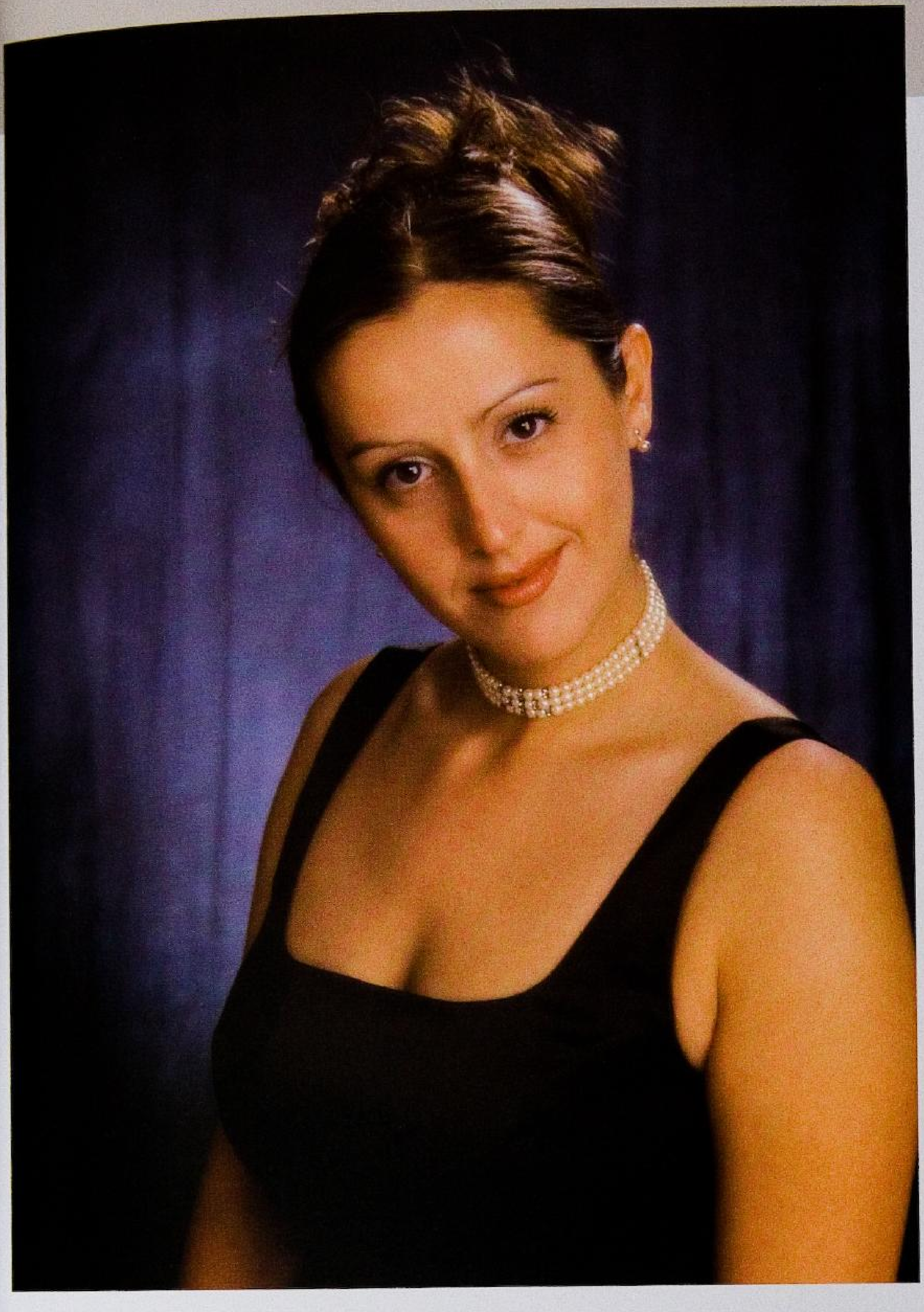
Fill light only
You can see how light washes across the subject.

Fill and key lights
The fill light controls the contrast, while the key light creates the highlight and hence the shadows on the subject; this gives shape to the face.

Hair light only
This shows the illumination and spread from the hair light; the subject is beginning to stand out from the background.

Background light only
This shows the illumination and spread of the background light, which will help to give a three-dimensional relief to the portrait.

Fill, key, and hair lights
A honeycomb on the hair light helps to control the spill of the light to the shoulders.



tips

- Position the camera at the chest height of the subject.
- Always keep the fill light behind the camera.
- Make sure the key light gives a catchlight in the eyes.
- When setting up each light, switch off all other lights so that you can see the effect.
- Measure the power off each light separately.
- Do not position the key light too high, as this gives no highlight or color in the eyes, or too low, as this throws a shadow from the nose across the cheek and (even worse) toward the eye.

The final result
This portrait uses the 45° lighting technique with a softening filter attached to the camera lens, which slightly softens the skin and any irregularities and helps to blend the transition from highlight to shadow. I also used a black plastic vignette with a tooth serration around its oval aperture to help darken the clothing.

subject and the background and to enhance the sheen of the hair. Position it on the same side as the key light and approximately 45° behind the subject; this will usually be close to the edge of the backdrop, just out of shot.

The power setting will vary depending on the sitter's hair color, as dark hair needs more illumination than light hair. As a rough guide, set it to the same as, or one stop less than, the key light. I attach a honeycomb adapter to the front of the hair light, which helps to control the direction and spread of the light.

Background light

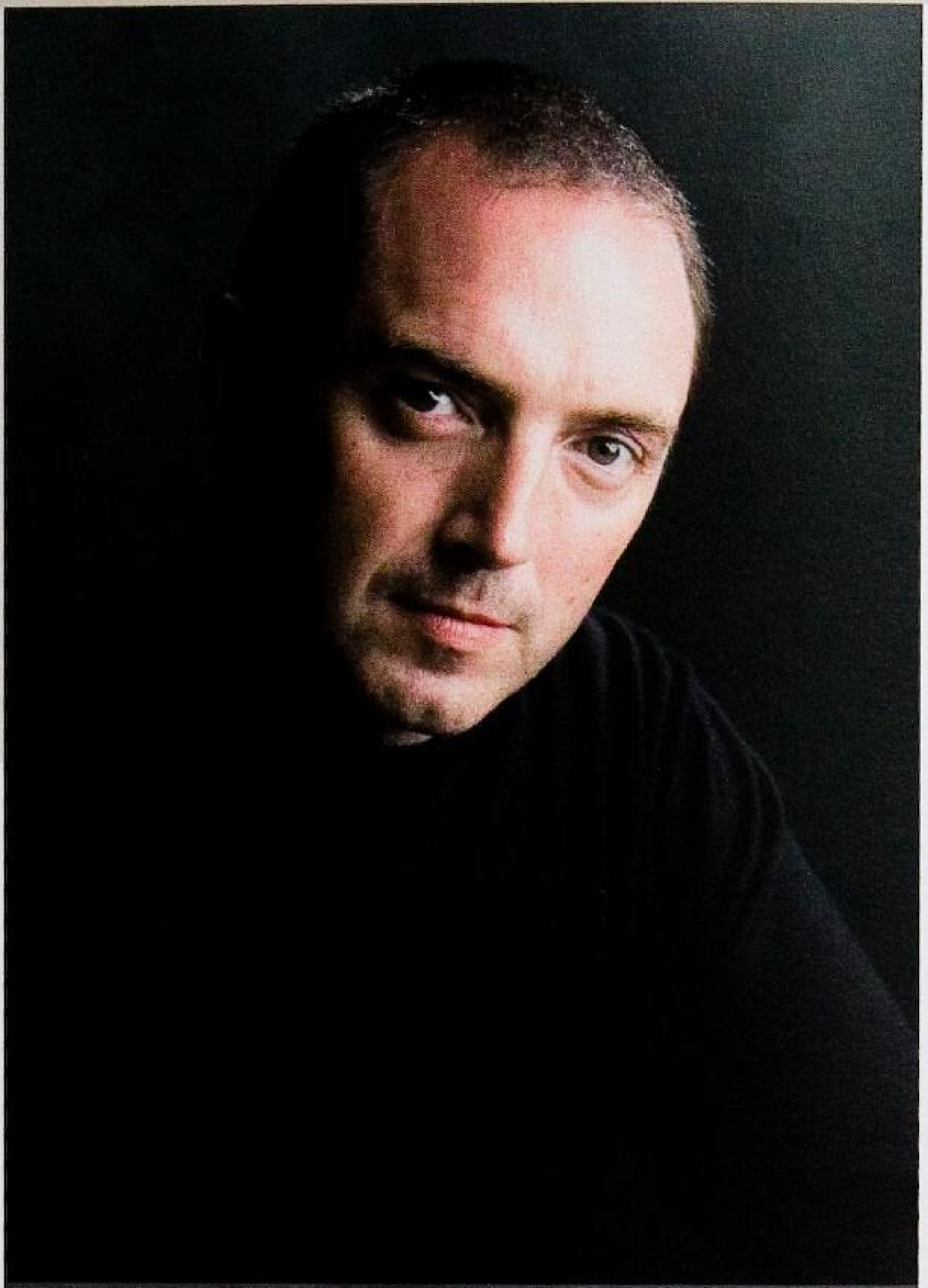
The background light is used to give the impression of space between the sitter and the background. Place it on a floor stand behind the subject, with a reflector dish attached to it to illuminate the brightest point behind the subject's shoulder blades. The light will gradually fall off to give a natural vignette to the portrait, as well as drawing attention to the subject's face. The power setting will depend on the color of the background and on how much light it absorbs, but start by setting it somewhere around the key-light setting.

now try this:

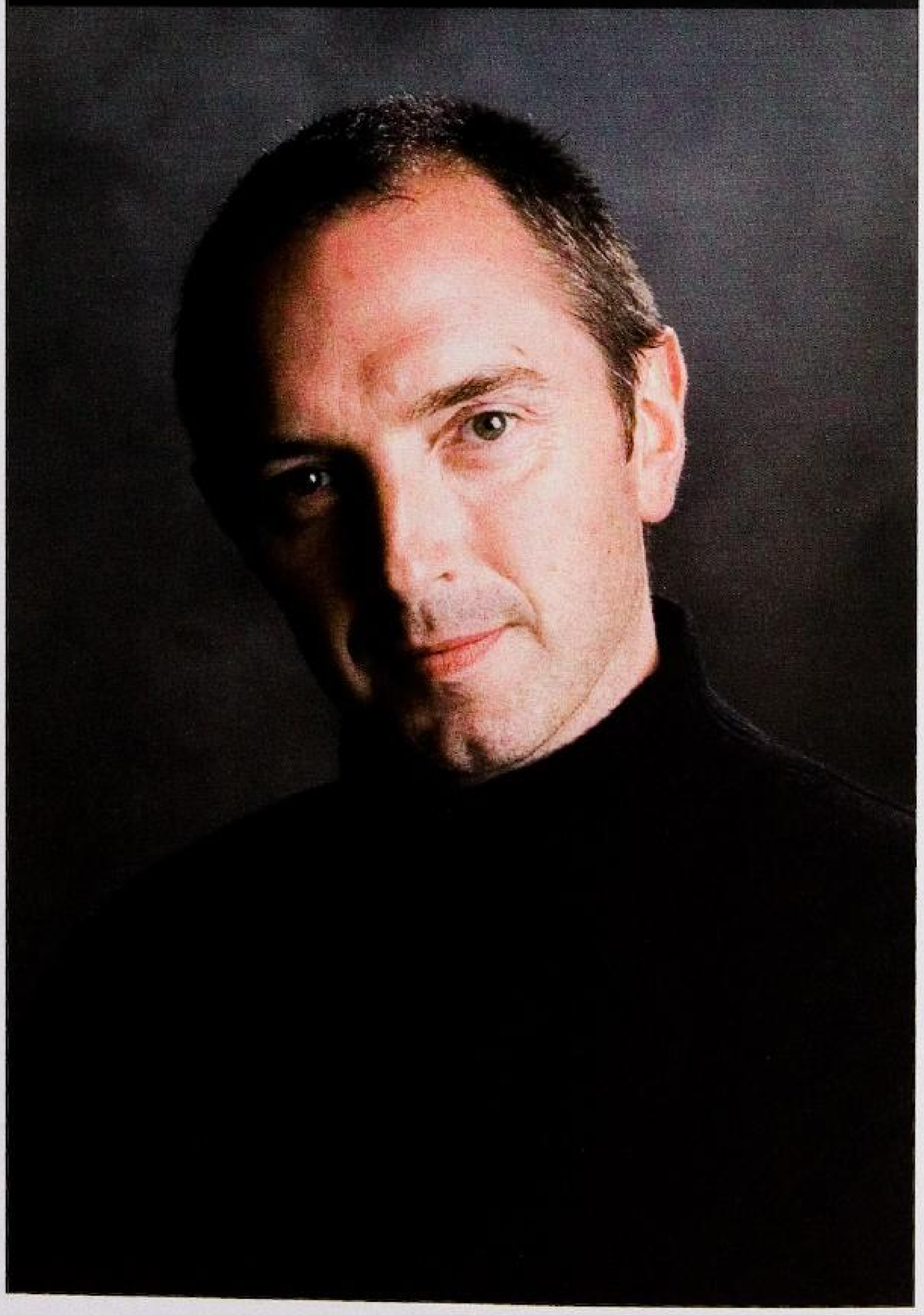
Set up your 45° lighting set-up. Switch off all room lights and close any drapes. Starting with the fill light, observe in turn how each light performs. Try moving the key light closer to the subject and then move it away to see how much the light illuminates as well as any change in shape and pattern. Try the key light at different heights, looking for the catchlight in the subject's eyes as well as for the shadow that will appear between the nose and the top lip.

Narrow and Broad Lighting

Narrow and broad lighting are probably the two terms that are the most confusing for portrait photographers, but they are two powerful techniques that you must learn and understand. They are both based on 45° lighting.



Narrow lighting
Narrow lighting puts most of the face in shadow but brings attention to the five planes of the face—the forehead, nose, chin, and the two cheeks.



Broad lighting
Broad lighting highlights and accentuates the broadest side of the face visible to camera.

tips

- Narrow lighting is great for women and for reducing overall body size.
- Always shoot women from above bust height to exaggerate the eyes and make the neck look longer.
- For a more dramatic image, turn off the fill light.

Narrow lighting

In narrow lighting, as you might expect, only a relatively small area of the face is highlighted. With the 45° lighting set-up in place, ask your model to turn or tilt his or her head toward the shoulder nearest the key light, so that it illuminates the area from the ear (if it is visible) to the tip of the nose on the side of the face furthest from the camera. Although more of the shadowed side of the face is visible, the highlighted side now occupies a relatively small area of the picture.

Because only a relatively small area is highlighted, narrow lighting instantly makes the subject look thinner. If the face is turned too far, however, the key light will start to light the shadow side of the face and the effect will be lost.

This technique should not be confused with split lighting (see page 56).

Broad lighting

In broad lighting, the head is turned slightly away from the key light. The highlighted area now appears wider than the shadowed side and, because the eye is instantly drawn to the highlighted flesh, the face seems wider and

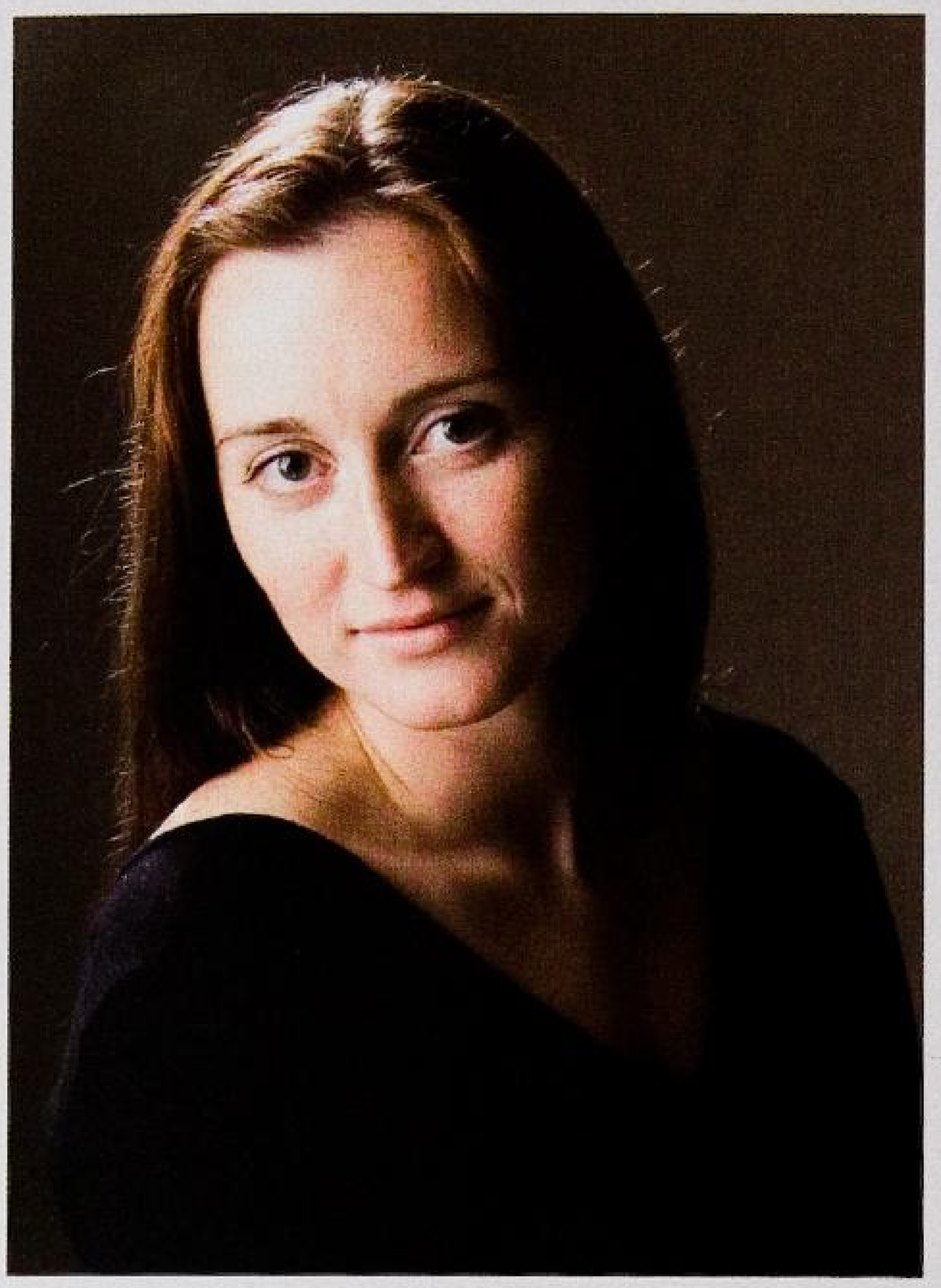
fatter. This is exaggerated in a low-key style of portrait, as the highlighted skin stands out even more against a dark background.

Broad lighting can be used to give power and strength to a portrait and is generally used in male portraiture to exaggerate the subject's masculine qualities. Be careful not to turn the face too far, as this will make the ear dominate the portrait, even when it is in shadow.

Broad lighting should not be confused with flat lighting, but both techniques give the appearance of weight gain (see page 53).

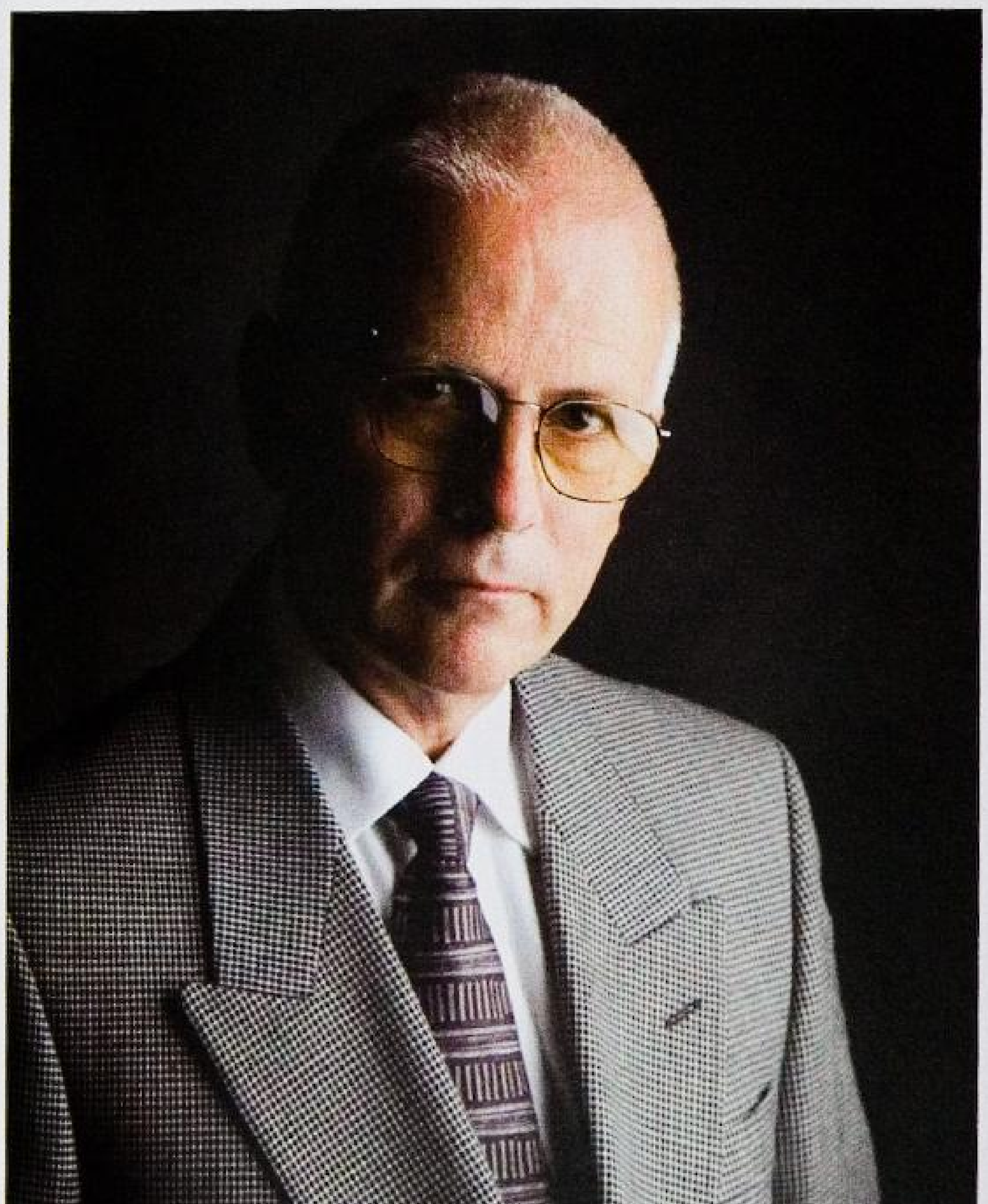
Tilting the head

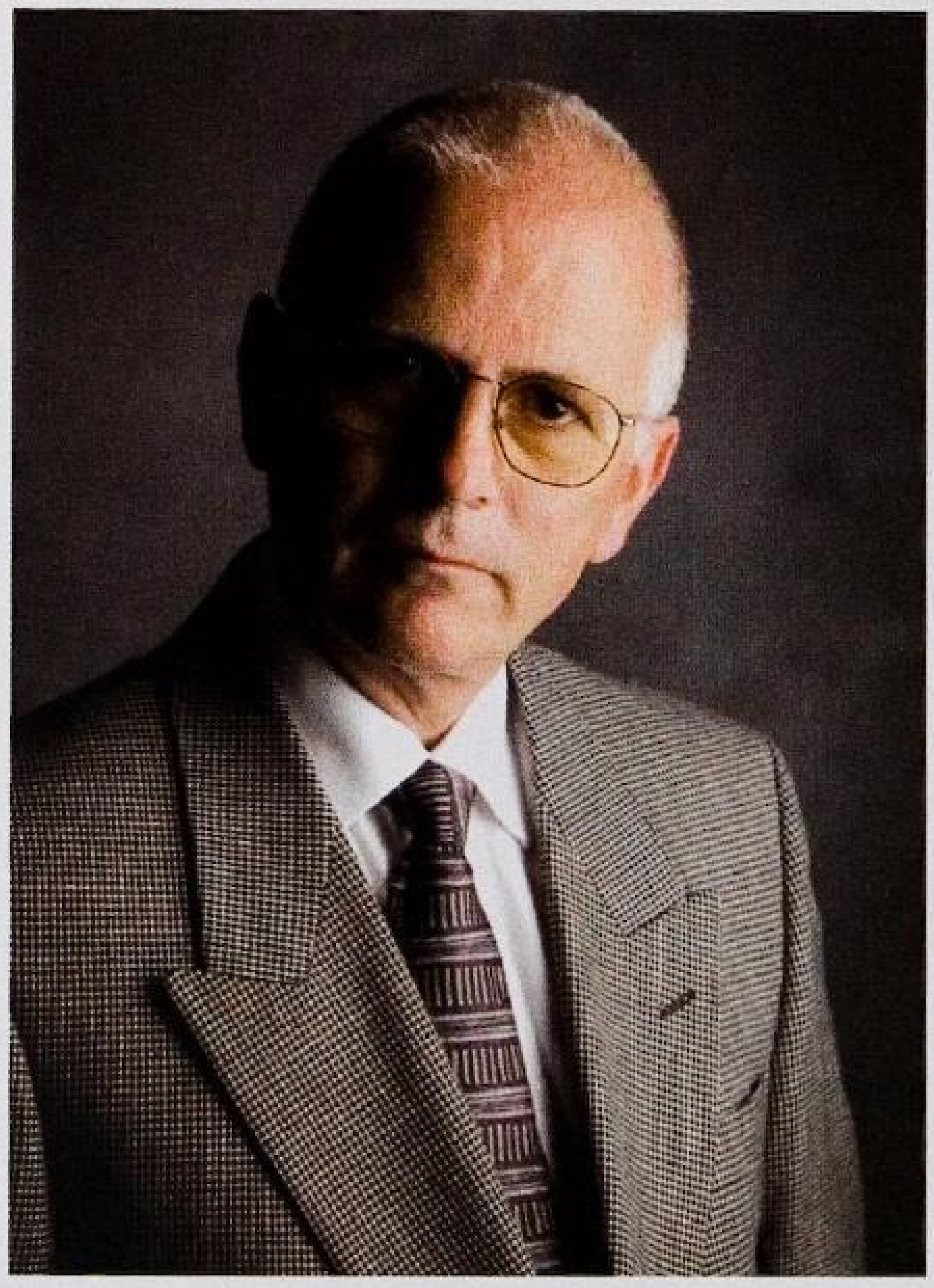
The shot on the left demonstrates the use of narrow lighting. In the shot on the right a shift in pose, with no adjustment to the lighting, accidentally produced a broad-lit image. As you can see, the narrow-lit image is far more appealing to the eye.



Narrow lighting

Accidental broad lighting





Exaggerating the effect

These two examples exaggerate the effect of broad and narrow lighting because only one light is used in each case. The lack of shadow detail makes it easier to see the effect; a simple trick is always to squint when observing the light on a subject's face.

now try this...

Photograph several individuals using both narrow and broad lighting techniques. Then show different people the pairs of images and ask which ones they find most attractive. You will find that most people prefer the narrow-lit images.

Two-thirds and Three-quarter Face Portraits

When the subject is looking away from the camera, as in a two-thirds or a three-quarter shot, you need to slightly reposition the key light to achieve the same 45° lighting quality.

Both facial positions start with the subject or subjects looking away from the camera and toward the key light. However, if you keep the key light in the same position, the facial features will appear flattened. Although this is ideal for spotty or pitted skin, you lose the natural three-dimensional modeling created by the shadows and highlights. You will also see that the eyes look glazed and washed out; this is because the light is reflected straight into them and they lose their color.

To maintain the 45° lighting pattern, simply move the key light in an arc to match the turn of the face. By doing this, you will maintain the highlight and shadow areas and make your subject look thinner at the same time. Theoretically you should also move the fill light, but in all honesty I seldom do so.

With both these facial positions, the eyes are often looking toward the soft box; as a result, too much of the white of the eye is visible—a very unattractive effect. You need to correct this by asking your subject to glance toward the edge of the key-light soft box nearest the camera; this will give both depth and color to the eye.

With a three-quarter face portrait, pay particular attention to the position of the nose: it must not cut through the far cheek. This is a common mistake in portraiture; the effect is to exaggerate the client's nose, making it seem much bigger than normal. In addition to moving the key light to keep the lighting pattern, tell your subject to look away so that, from your camera position, you can just see the far cheek. Remember that the eyes should always show detail and as little white as possible.

▼ Two-thirds face
This portrait shows the perfect set-up for a two-thirds facial portrait. To maintain the 45° lighting pattern, the key light has been moved in an arc so that it is at 45° to the subject's nose and far ear.

Common pitfalls

Fattened face and exaggerated nose
Because the key light has not been moved, the face is flat lit, making the subject look slightly fatter than she really is. In addition, she has turned too far away from the camera; her nose now breaks through the line of the cheek, which makes it look bigger.

Eye position
This portrait shows the most common fault in portraits in which the subject is looking off camera; the model has moved her eyes, revealing too much of the white of the eye—a very unflattering portrait.

◀ **Thinning the face**
This is a great example of how 45° lighting not only makes the subject look thinner but also gives some depth and mood.

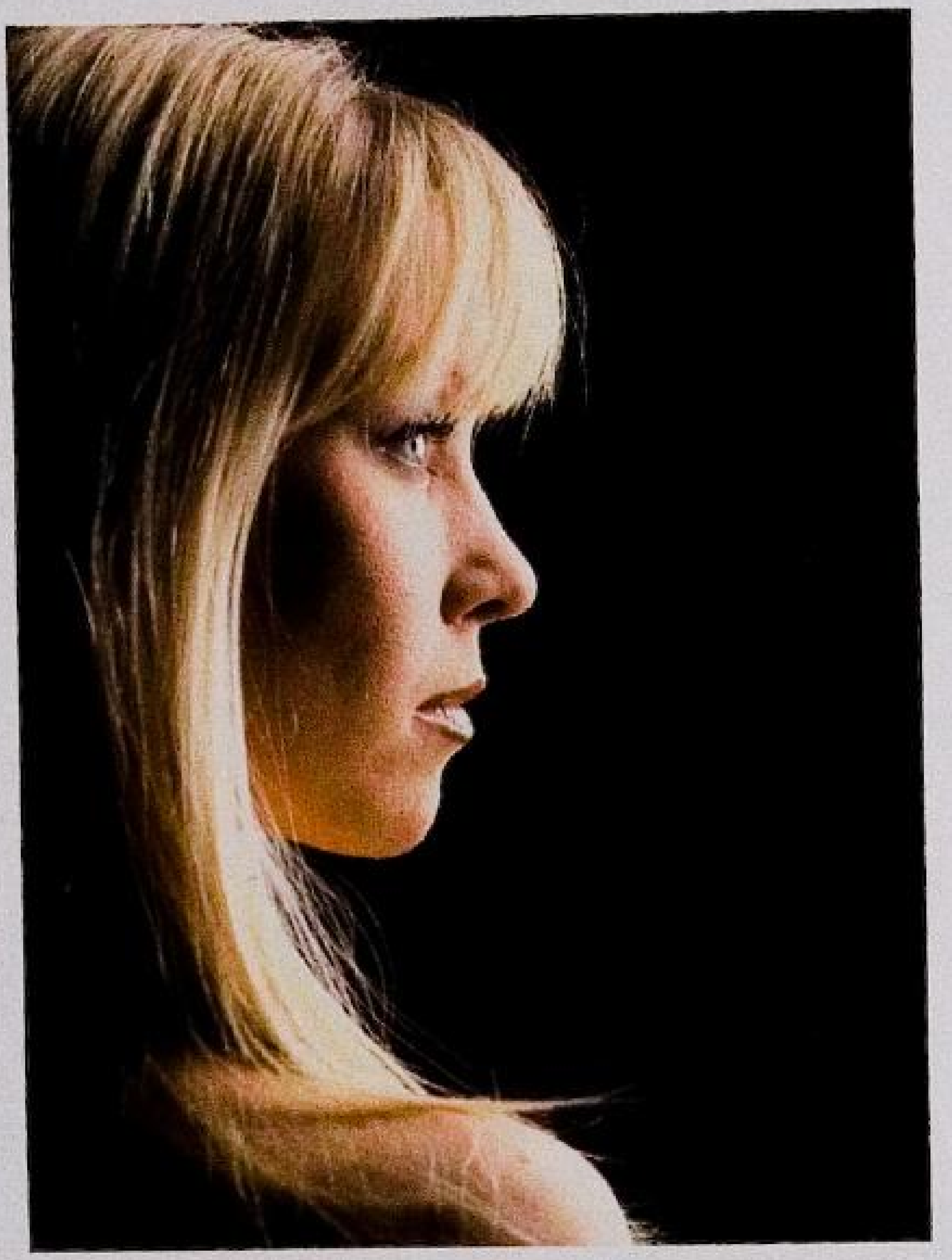
▲ **Flat lighting**
When your subject has great cheek bones, mistakes with lighting can be hidden. In the shot above, even though the key light has not been moved far enough to maintain the 45° lighting pattern, the subject's natural bone structure creates shadowing, disguising the flatness of the light.

Profile Lighting

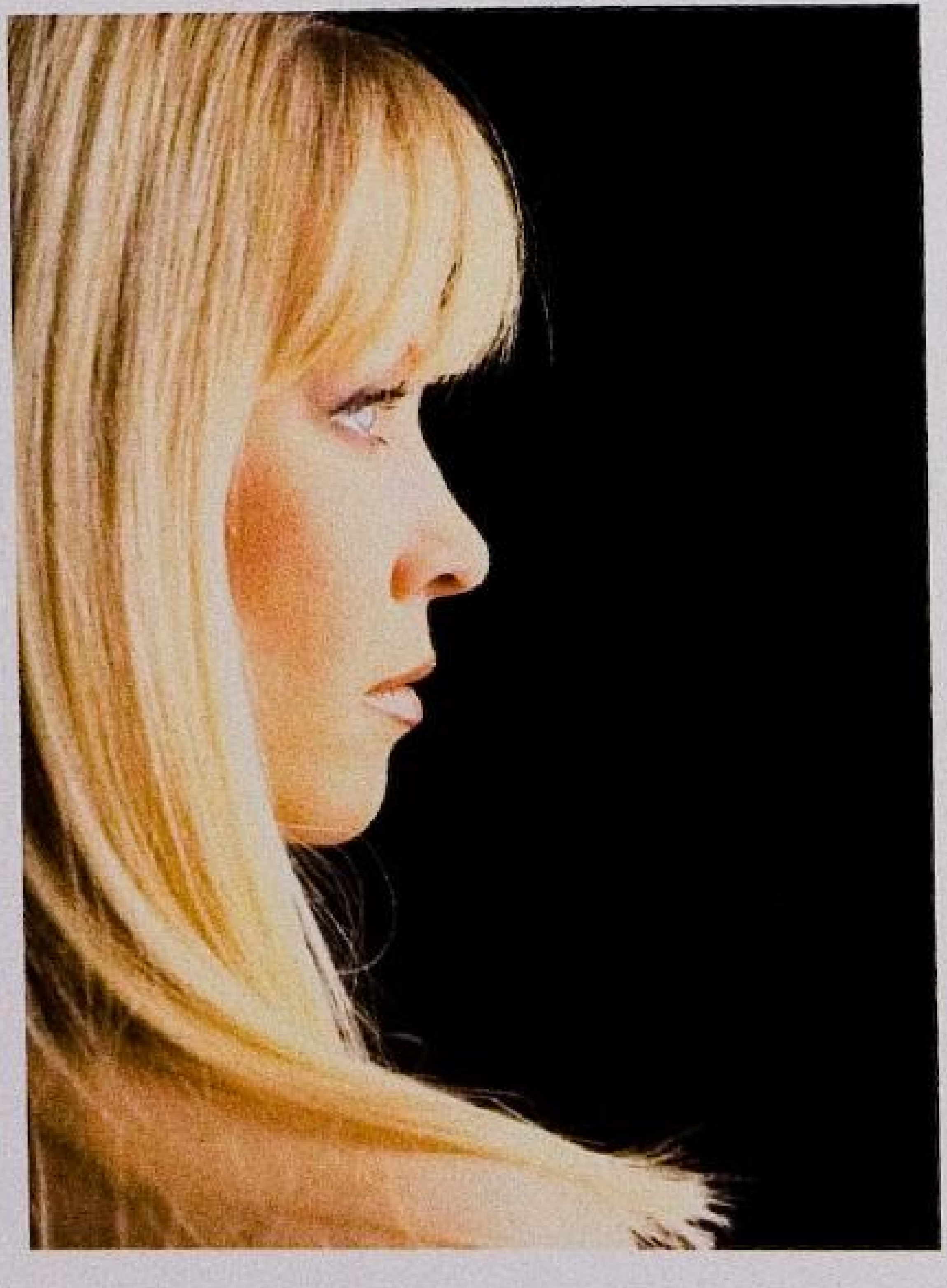
When lit correctly and used against a dark background, a portrait in profile can be one of the most dynamic images. There are, however, a few rules to keep in mind to make sure that the portrait flatters the subject and does not emphasize bad features.

The first thing to consider with a profile shot is whether the style will suit your subject, as it will exaggerate the shape of both the nose and the chin.

Lighting a profile is simple. I generally prefer to use just two lights—a soft box as the main light to give the overall illumination and create the roundness of the face, and a second light to light the hair and chisel out the features, which will add to the drama of the portrait. I like the mood created by the touches of light on the planes of the face minimizing detail in the shadow. However, there may be occasions when you want to include a fill light to give more detail in the shadows.



The profile and 45° lighting
With the key light at 45° to the subject's nose and the background, a shadow is created on the subject's face and back, which gives beautiful modeling and a more dramatic mood. Even with the light in the correct position, the subject's eyes look a little glazed because the soft box is reflected in the eye.



Flat lighting the profile
Positioning the key light directly in front of the subject creates a soft and gentle image. The lighting is flat and so any skin imperfections are naturally softened due to the lack of shadow—but note how the position of the key light has resulted in the eyes looking washed out and colorless.

Key light

Fit the key light with a small soft box, as you are lighting only the head and shoulders of the subject. The soft box has many layers of diffusion to give a soft and gentle light, but you can control the specularity by removing one or more of the diffusion layers.

Position the key light at 45° to the subject; this creates the same characteristics as the 45° lighting technique, giving a shadow to the near cheek and slimming and defining the subject.

If your subject's skin is quite pitted and spotted, this lighting set-up could produce an unflattering image. To get around the problem, simply position the key light directly in front of your subject; this will diffuse the shadows of the pitting, giving a flatter lit portrait. However, the consequent reduction in modeling will also have the effect of making your subject's face look fatter.

Hair light

The hair light serves two roles in this style of lighting: not only does it give an outline to the subject and illuminate the top of the head and hair, but it also sharpens the profile and adds an added specula to the highlight, giving an accented light to the four planes of the face that are visible (namely, the forehead, nose, chin, and cheek). This has the effect of exaggerating the outline and any facial flaws even more.

tips

- If someone has a prominent nose, a profile shot is probably best avoided.
- The most common fault with a profile portrait is the position of the eye: often the subject looks slightly away from the key light, resulting in too much white of the eye being visible. Ask your subject to look toward the edge of the soft box nearest the camera.
- Use the natural flow of your subject's hair to disguise any wrinkles on the neck.

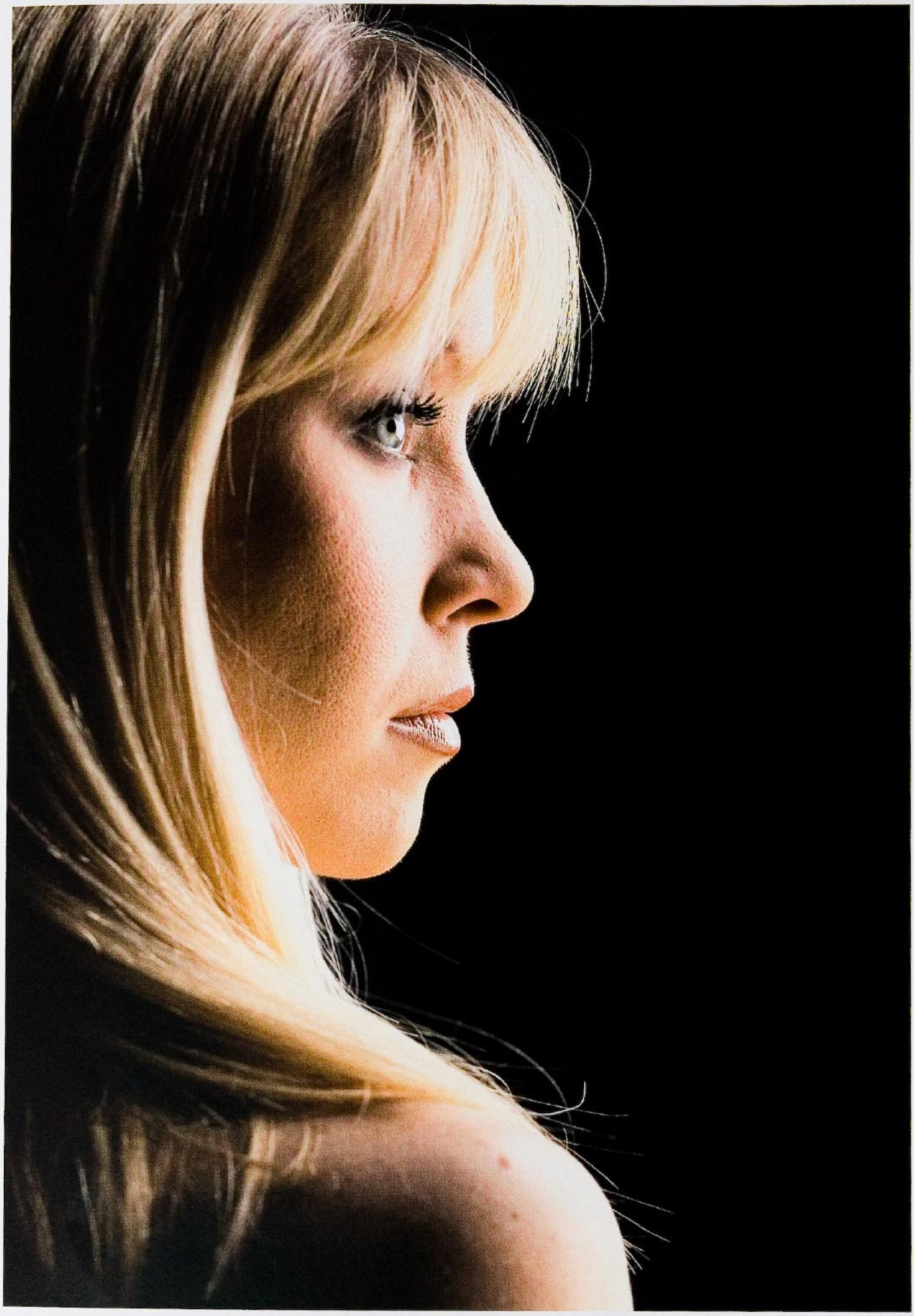
Fill light

There is often no need for a fill light in a profile set-up, as it will only serve to reduce the shadow on the side of the face nearest the camera, which will distract and give less impact. However, if you do require detail on the side of the face, set the fill light to 1½ stops less than the key light and position it behind the camera, diffused to create a flat wash of light across the subject. If you are working on location and using a window to light the profile, position a reflector in front of the camera, make sure you do not light the back of the head and, if possible, take care not to draw too much attention to the ear.

Background light

A background light is not essential, but if you do use one, you should do so discreetly, so as not to draw too much attention to the background.

A background light will naturally separate the subject from the background. If you use a gel on the background light to add color or if you light a colored background with a snoot or a honeycomb, the image will take on a very different mood. Do not light the background too brightly or you will distract the viewer's eye from the subject.



Enhancing the eye color
In this shot, the key light is in the same position as in the shot opposite, but I asked the model to look slightly toward the camera. This reduces the amount of white of the eye that is visible and gives the iris more saturation in color.

Split Lighting

Split lighting is exactly what it says: it lights one half of the subject while keeping the other half in complete shadow. It is a very simple and effective way of changing the mood of a portrait and is most often used for male portraits.

The simplest way to achieve a split-lit portrait is to use only a key light and a hair light. Any fill light or reflector panel would add detail in the shadow area, defeating the whole object of the split light.

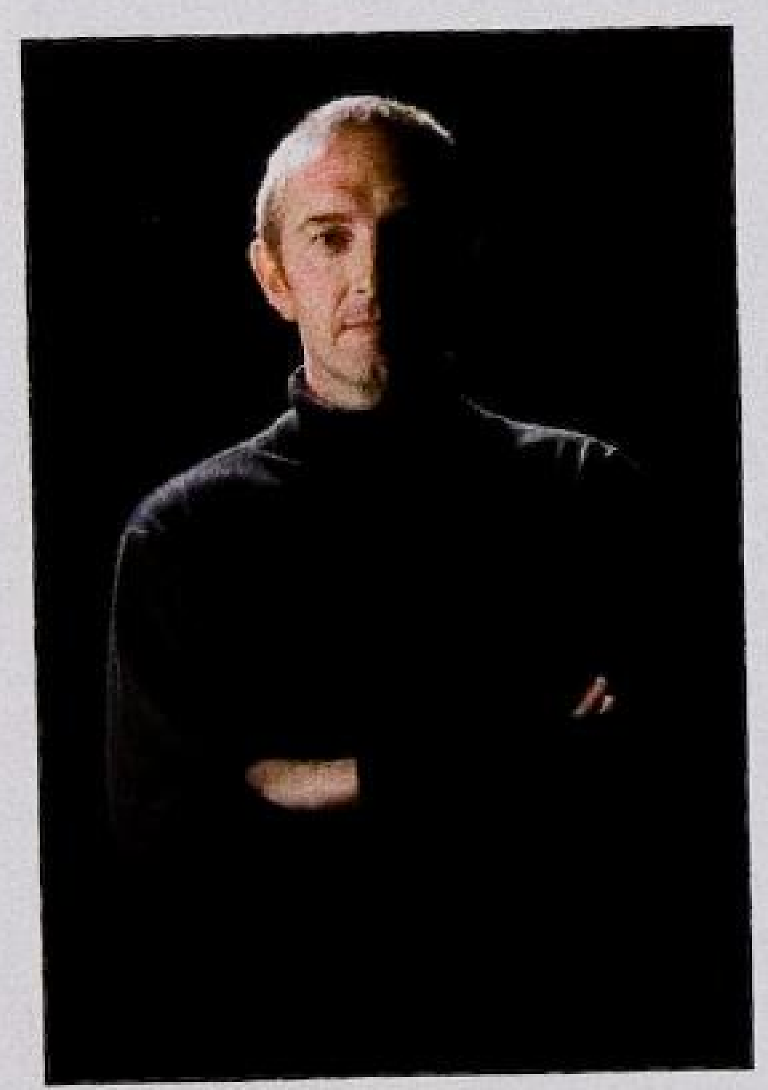
Key light

The key light can be fitted with any accessory provided it will control the spillage; the most effective is a narrow soft box or a reflector dish fitted with barn doors or a honeycomb. Position the light at 90° to the subject and camera position and tweak it until nothing is lit on the far side of the portrait, giving a shadow line through the center of the nose and face. This lighting effect works equally well with soft and hard lighting, as they both give a theatrical look.

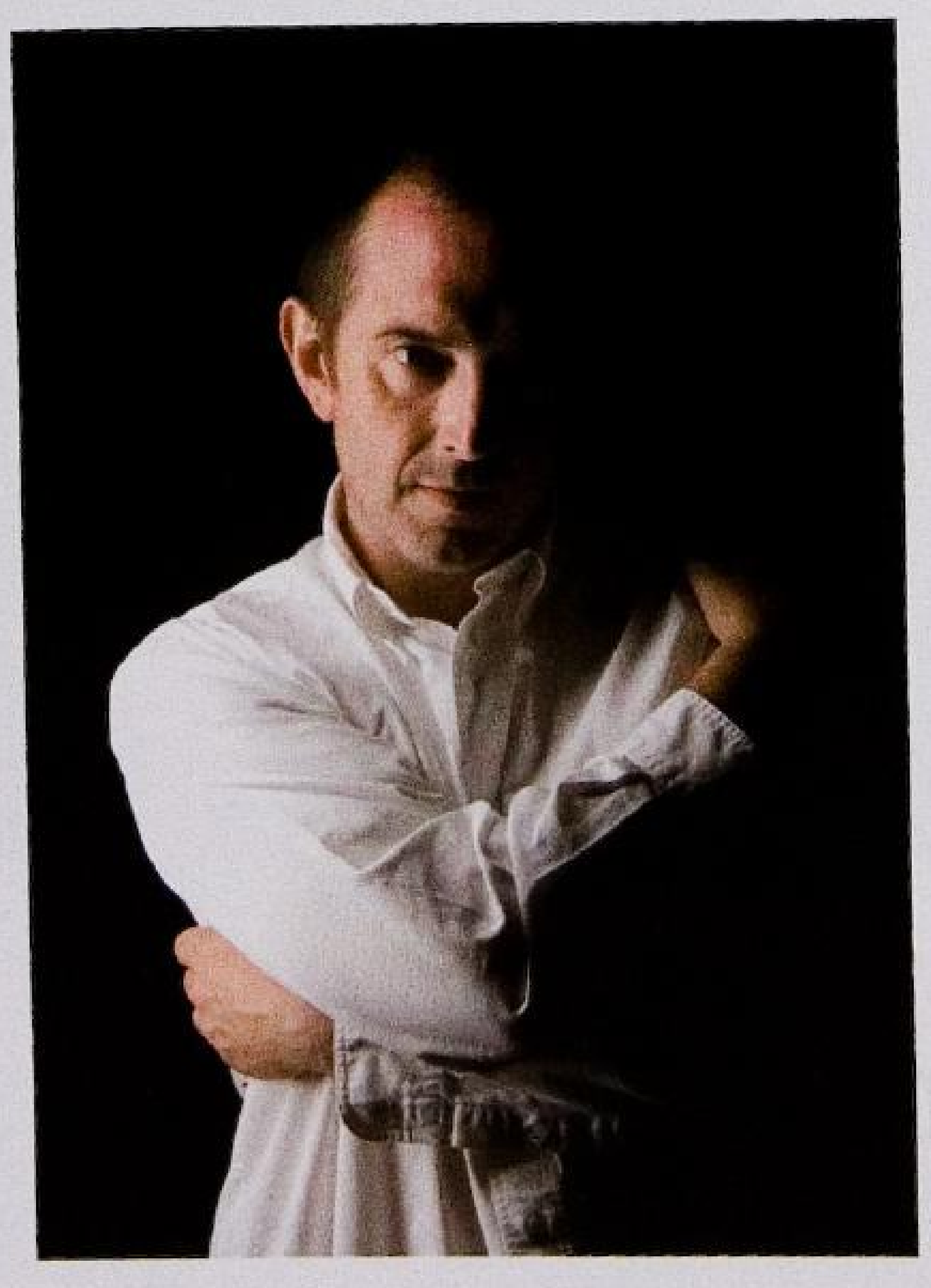
Hair light

This can be used not only to give detail to the hair but also to separate the subject from the background. The hair light usually remains on the same side as the key light and is positioned just out of shot at the rear of the subject. You can, however, place the hair light on the opposite side, highlighting the side of the body and face in shadow; this should only be done for effect as it will not mimic the sun's one direction of light.

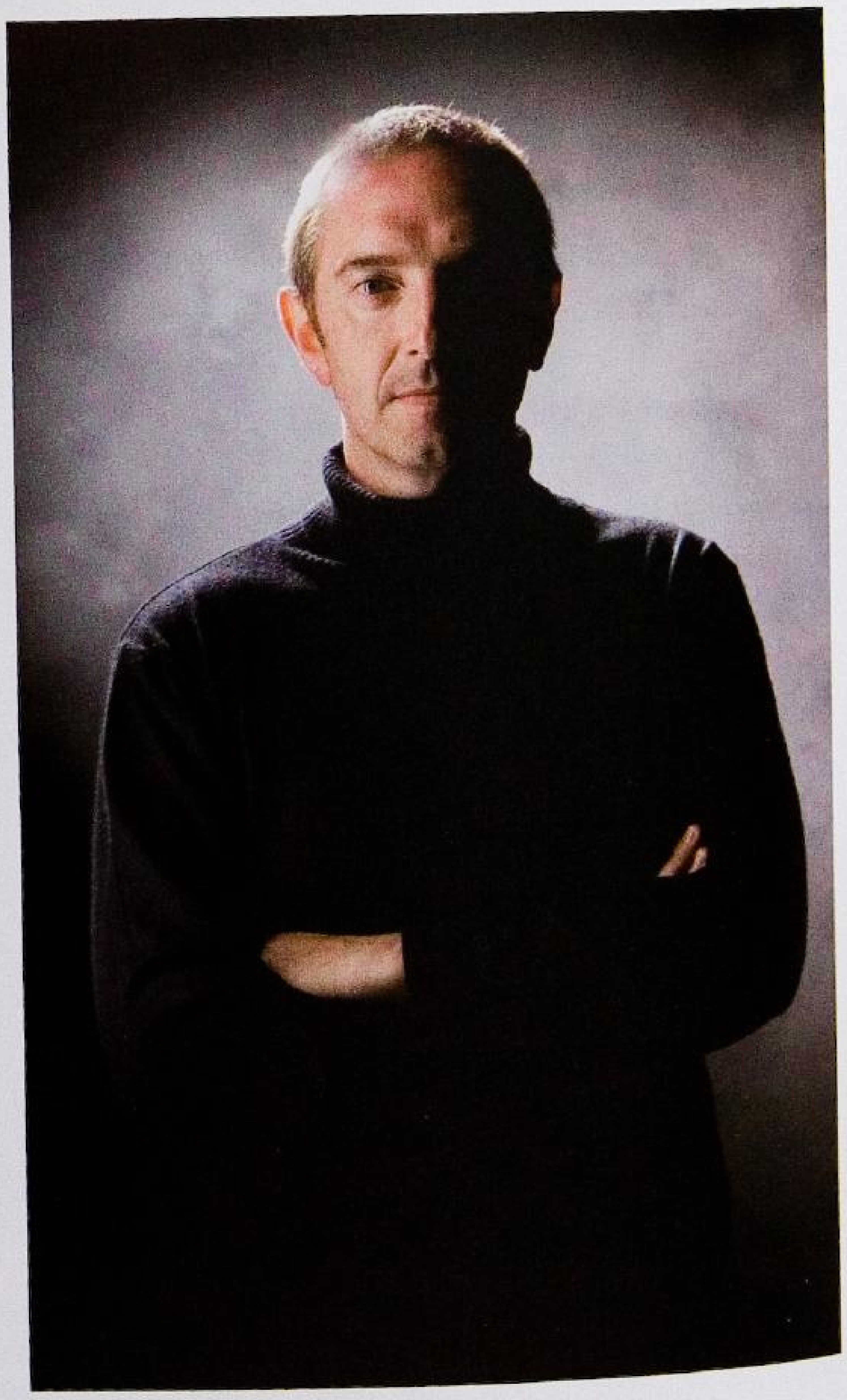
▶ **Split lighting with one light**
A simple way to create a perfect split-lit portrait is to use just one light at 90° to the subject, so that one half of the body is side lit and one half is in shadow.



▲ **Adding separation**
Here, a hair light fitted with a honeycomb was added to give good separation between the subject and the background and give a more three-dimensional look.



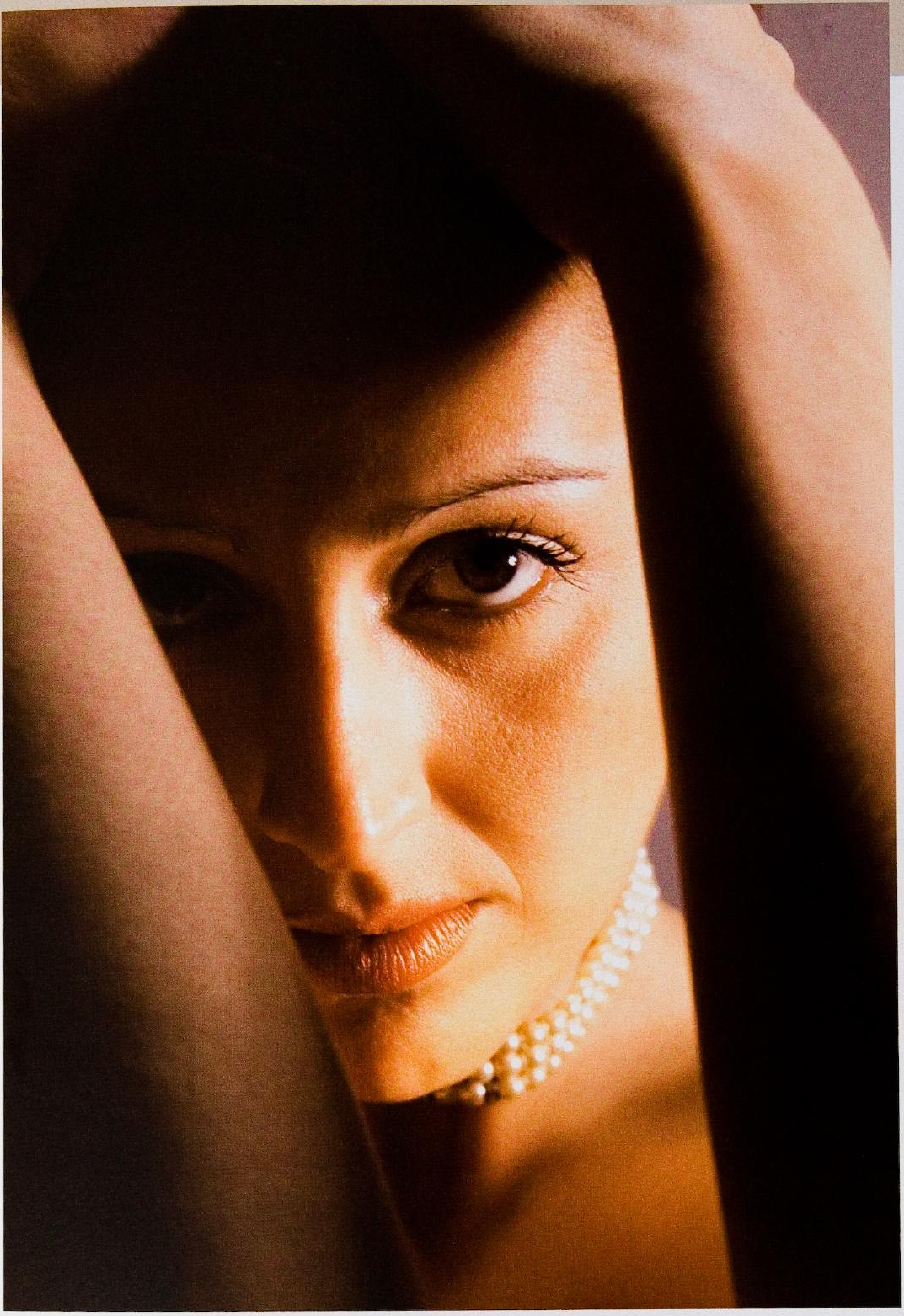
▶ **Light clothing as a reflector**
Here, the subject is in light clothing; the natural spill of any light near the face acts as a reflector and lifts some of the shadow area.



▲ **Adding a background light for separation**
Lighting the background gives more separation, but some impact can be lost.

now try this...

- To see how simple the split-light technique is, stand your subject near a window in a dark room with the drapes closed. Slightly open a drape to give a slit of light and ask your subject to walk through the beam of light.
- Split light your subject and then split light the background.
- Try using a colored gel on the hair light: blues and reds are great. See how the addition of a colored rim around the subject completely changes the mood and style of the portrait as the subject's outline, including the shadow side, will be completely rim lit.



▲ Controlling the light
I split lit the face but controled the light falling onto the arms and hands by positioning a subtractive panel, a French flag, beside the arm nearest the light, which slightly diffused the high-light. The same arm blocked light falling on the other arm, so as not to create a distraction.

▶ Positioning the light
This shows the key light fitted with a reflector dish aimed at 90° to the subject.

Butterfly Lighting

Butterfly lighting derives its name from the butterflylike shadows under the nose of the subject, which are created by the light being positioned overhead. Butterfly lighting is commonly used in beauty photography.

Butterfly lighting is very simple: all you need is a very large, soft light source directly above and in front of the subject; the closer the soft box is to the subject, the softer the light and effect. You can lift any shadows by positioning a reflector panel directly under and in front of the subject. Because the light is pointed directly at the subject, it will give a flatter lighting with less shadow—and hence, because of the lack of shadow, the face will appear fatter.

A higher camera viewpoint is needed to slightly lift the chin and the eyes. Because this style of portrait is usually tightly composed, a telephoto lens is often employed to foreshorten the facial features and exaggerate the huge catchlights in the eyes from the soft box above and the reflector panel below. I tend to use a 120mm lens on medium format and a 100mm lens on 35mm format.

▲ **Horror lighting**
If the reflected light from under the subject seems more powerful than the light from the key light itself, as here, the portrait can look quite sinister.

▶ **Butterfly lighting**
Here you can see the butterflylike shadow beneath the cheek due to the position of the key light—the reason the technique gets its name.

tips

✦ Do not introduce too much light from below with the reflector panel, as this will give a horror movie effect. Choose either a white, silver, or sunlight reflector panel (see page 20).

now try this...

Position your subject directly beneath an overhead light source. Cover a piece of card with aluminum foil and place it beneath your subject's chin, so that it acts as a reflector panel and illuminates the subject's face. Ask your subject to move backward and forward and observe the difference: note that if he or she comes too far forward the only illumination to the face is from the reflector, giving a horror effect. When the subject moves back, more of the face will be lit—but if he or she does not move back far enough, the eye sockets will be in shadow and will look completely black, even with the reflector panel, .

Low-key Lighting

A low-key portrait is a traditional style of portrait photography. It mimics artists such as Rembrandt, who painted many of his subjects in a darkened environment, bringing attention to the face by creating very dominant highlights.

The secret of this style of portraiture is to combine dark clothing and a dark background with minimal lighting that controls and shapes the subject and provides just enough shadow detail to give depth and roundness. Contrast is controlled by means of the fill light or a reflector panel.

For low-key portraits, you need a key light and a background light, with each light doing one job so as to create highlight and shadow in a controlled and methodical way. (A fill and hair light can be used in low-key lighting, but then the results are very similar to the classic 45° set-up.)

Do not be fooled into thinking that because the image is dark, exposure is not a problem: overexposure will lead to portraits with very black shadows and very little detail, while underexposed portraits will result in a muddy print with dramatically reduced contrast.

Key light

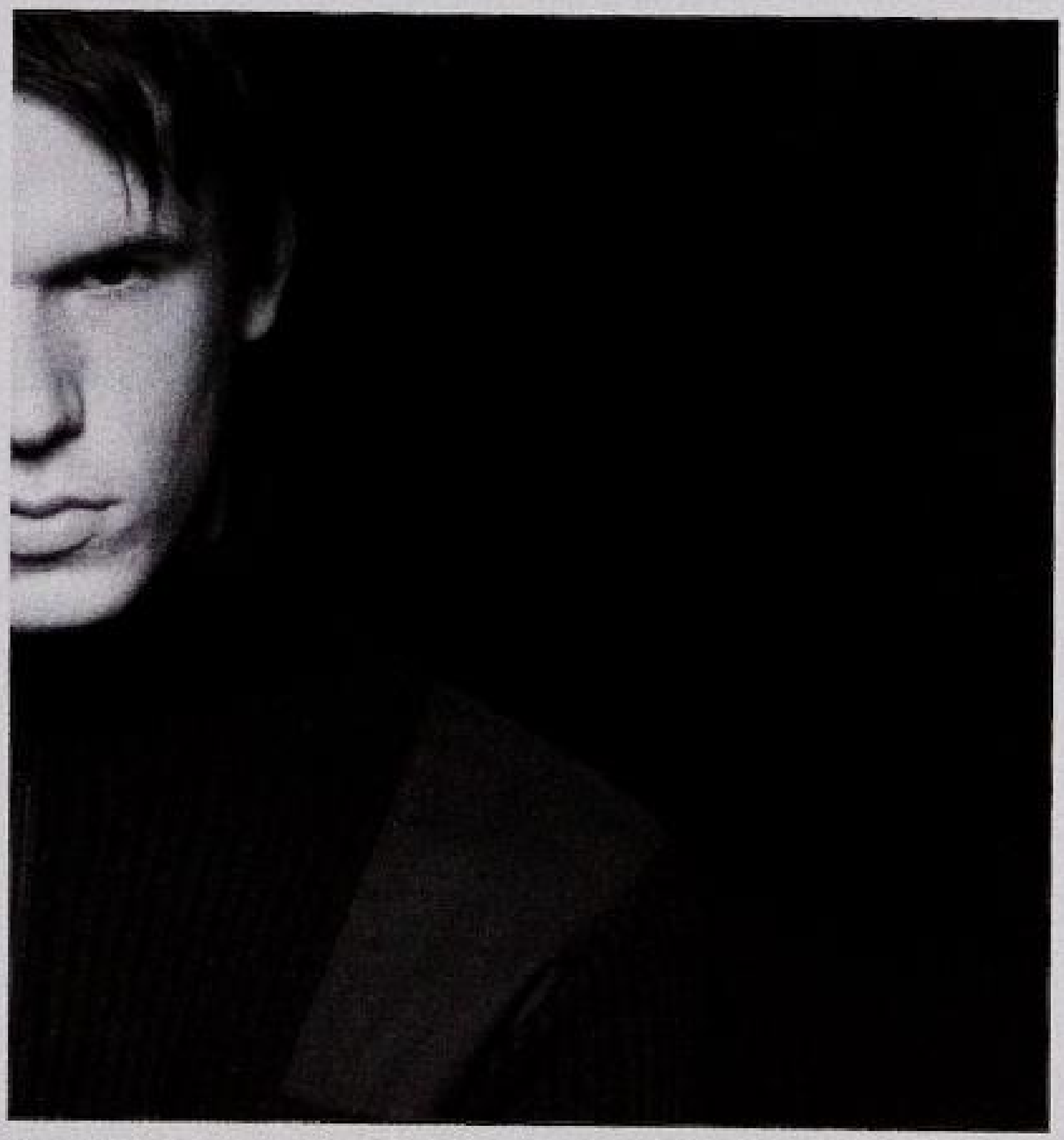
Position the key light at 45° to the subject and fit it with either a soft box for a subtle portrait or with a reflector dish and barn doors for a more dramatic and hard-edged picture.

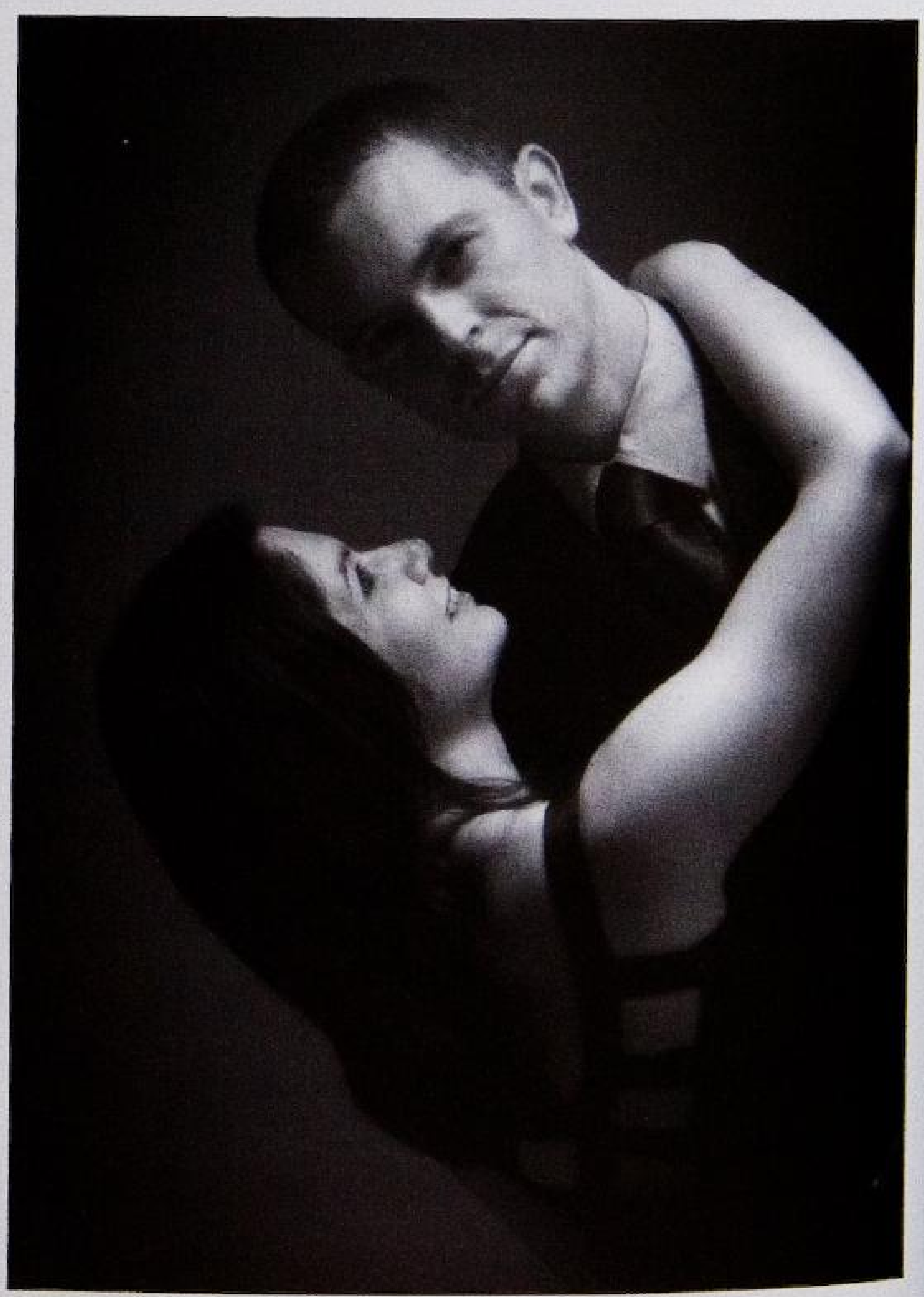
The subtlety in the portrait can be improved even more by using the feathered edge of the light.

Background light

As you can see, the function of the background light behind the subject is to separate and give a three-dimensional effect; take care not to overlight the background, as this will distract from this very powerful and dramatic style of image.

Detail in low key
My low-key portraits are often in black and white against a black background; the simplicity of the medium allows no distractions. Here, I used a parabolic reflector above and in front of the subject, so that the highlight draws attention to the five planes of the face, allowing a natural fall-off of light on his dark clothing.





Low-key portrait
This is a perfect example of a classic low-key portrait with a modern twist; the background is only slightly lit and the light directs our attention toward the skin, faces, and arm.

tips

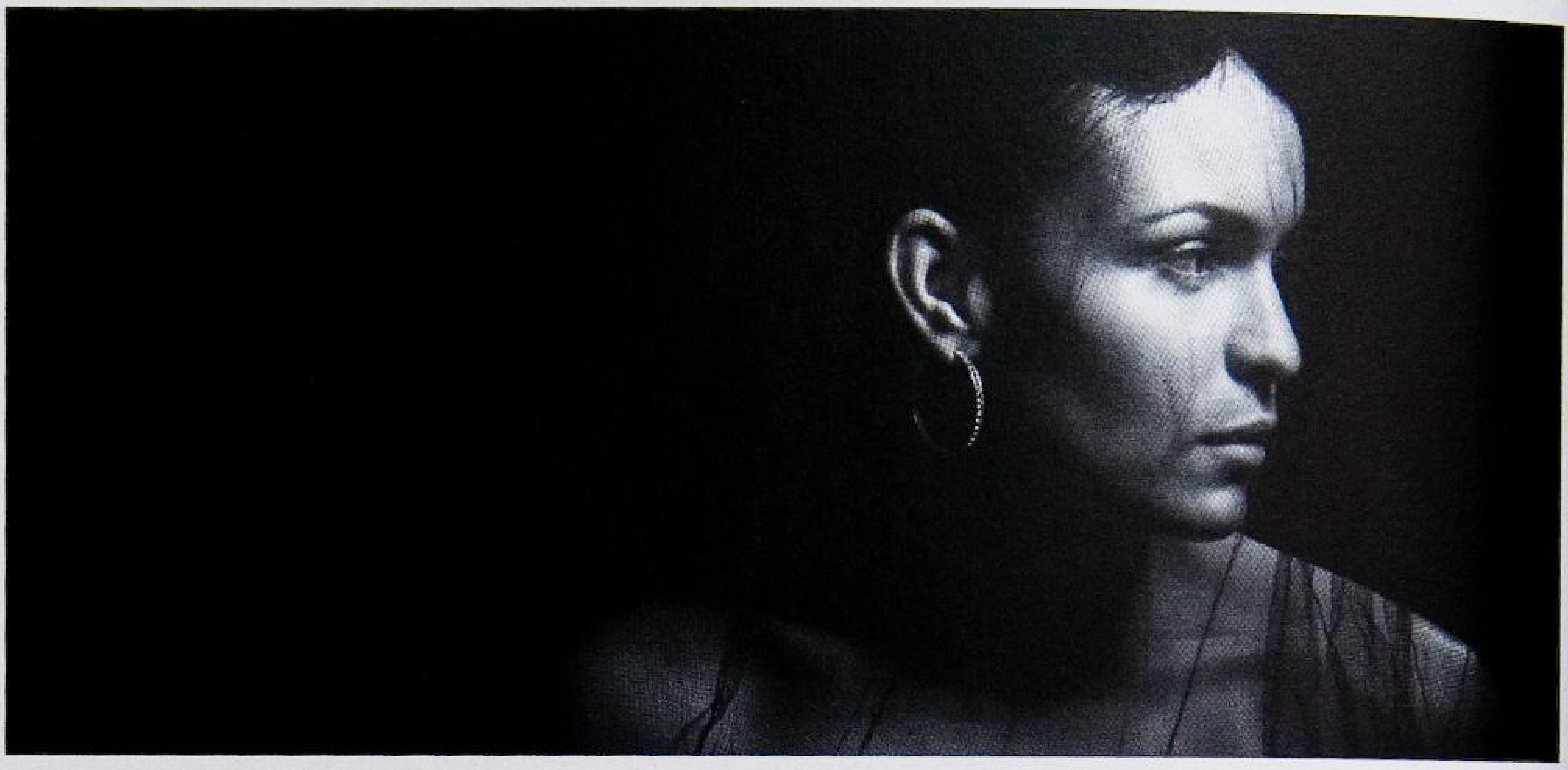
- Use low-key lighting for traditional-style portraits such as graduation portraits, as the style will give a sense of grandeur to the occasion.
- The low-key technique is great for profile portraits.
- Hands can be a distraction in a low-key portrait; they will naturally stand out against the dark clothing and background and seem even brighter because of their natural reflectancy, no matter what the skin color.
- If you have a problem seeing what the camera sees, squint to reduce contrast and mimic the effect from camera.

Subduing skin tone
When shooting the nude I always lean toward low-key images as, regardless of whether I'm shooting in black and white or color, the lighting enhances the mood of the image. Here I placed a piece of black netting over the subject to subdue the skin tone and diffuse the highlight from the key light. I drew attention to the overall shape of the body by lighting and exaggerating the background to create a halo effect around the subject. The viewer's eye will always search for the brightest part of a portrait, but when something is in front of the brightest element the eye will focus on the detail first.

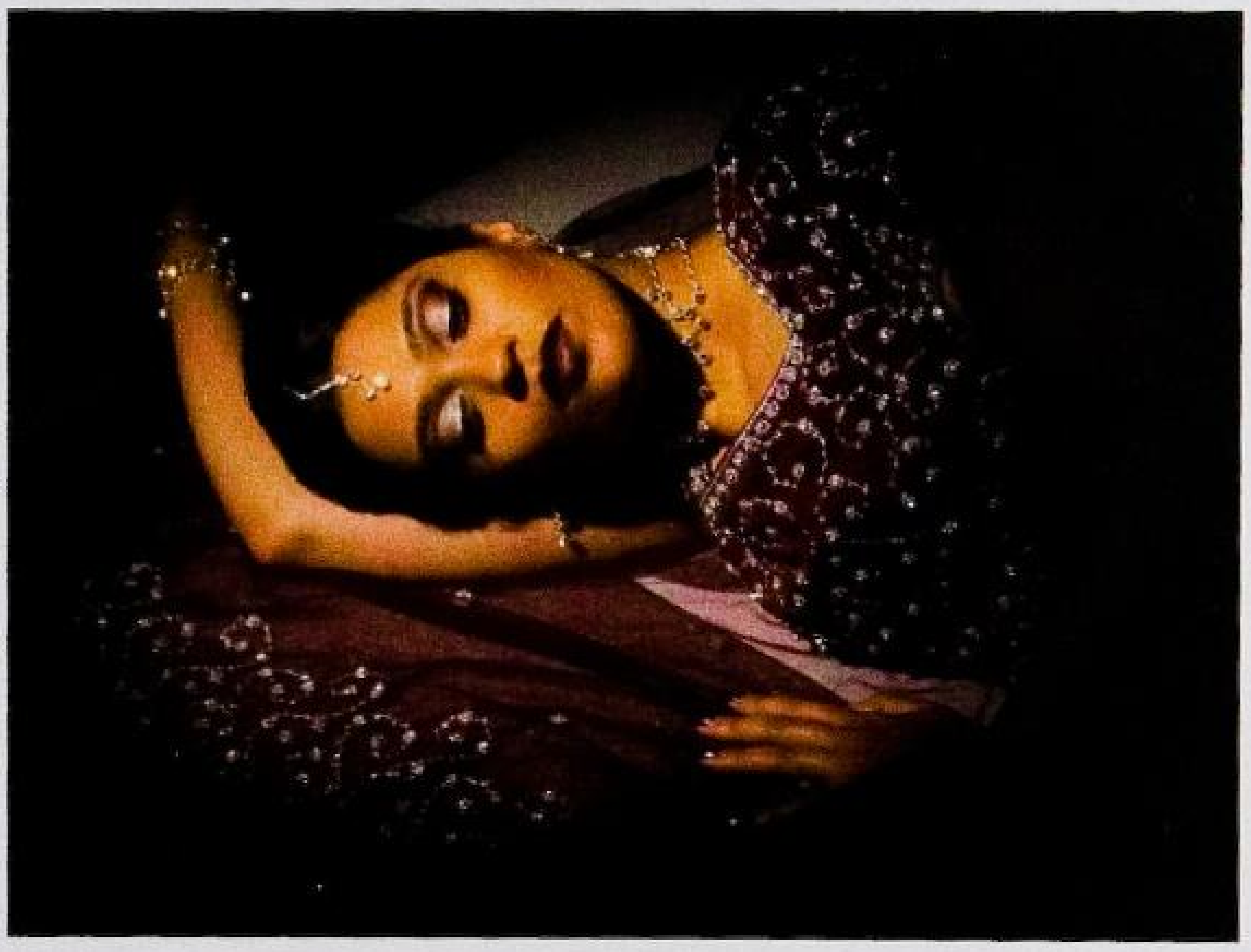
now try this:

In a darkened room, position your subject close to a strong light source such as a spotlight or strong sunlight through a small gap in the drapes. Ask your subject to start by wearing white or light colored clothing, then change to black or dark-colored garments, and finally to a very colorful outfit. Note how the darkness of the portrait changes. The dark clothing is more powerful, giving no distraction from the face and maintaining the low-key effect.

▶ Diffusing the skin tone
For this low-key portrait, I used a soft box as the key light and a honeycombed reflector dish as the hair light. I positioned the key light at 90° to the subject to hold the detail of the veil on the shoulders. The hair light was used to create a specular highlight on one shoulder, allowing the other side to drift into shadow.

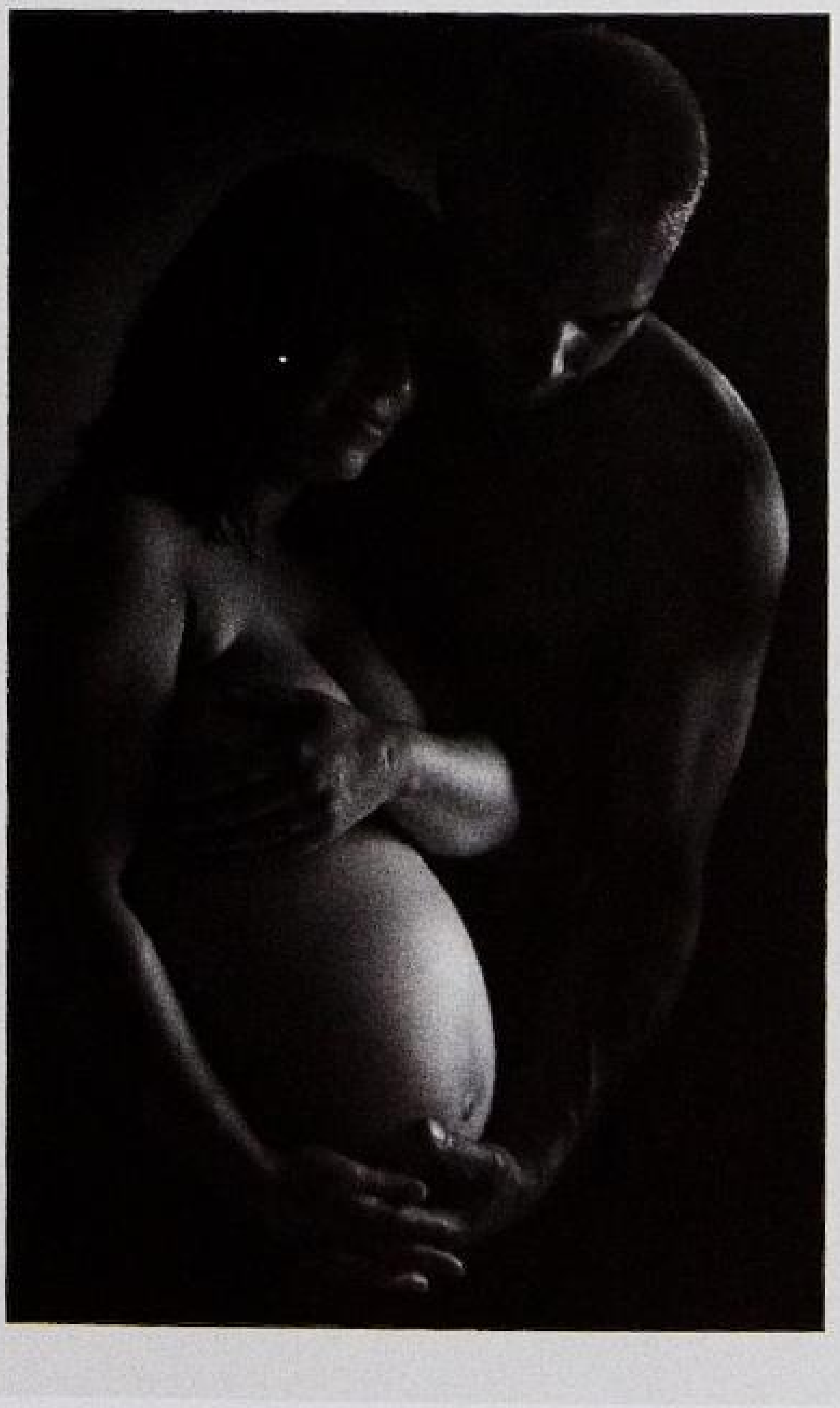


▶ Spotlighting the subject
Even though the subject was lying on a white background, the low-key effect was achieved by directing a spotlight onto her face and allowing the light to fall off on the background. The spotlight attachment was not fully focused, giving a slight spread of light and a natural vignette.



▶ Touches of light for detail
Hard light and a dark background instantly give drama to a male torso. This portrait sculpts the body with just two lights to emphasize the muscle tone. I positioned a key light, fitted with a reflector dish with a polished interior, low down and pointing back toward the camera to give a rim light effect, drawing the eye to the facial profile. The hard light source gives a very sharp highlight and makes this area the brightest part of the photograph. I positioned a soft box on the opposite side to the key light and slightly higher; the exposure is just enough to lift the muscle detail but not to distract.

Controlling highlights on skin
When you are faced with the reflectancy of skin, your skill in using light becomes more evident. Here, I positioned the key light at 45° to the pregnant woman to make her the dominant element of the photograph and emphasize the natural highlights on her belly. The man was positioned to shield part of the woman from the light, so as to enhance the mood. I used a background light to illuminate the gray background to allow good separation around the woman's head and shadowed shoulder.



Fine-tuning the light
In the black-and-white version, I kept the lighting set-up the same but fine-tuned the image by moving the father around and slightly closer to camera and lowering his shoulder in order to shade her even more with his body. Making the highlighted skin less dominant has given the portrait an increased moodiness and tenderness. It is often far quicker to move your subject than to alter the position of the light.

Low-key Portraits Using One Light

Even one light can create a powerful image—but when lighting is at a minimum, controlling the light source is even more important.

When you are using just one light the most important thing to consider is what else, in addition to the subject's face, needs to receive light in order to create roundness and shape, and produce a portrait with mood and a certain style. Start by deciding whether to use a soft or a hard light source for the portrait. With a single light, I generally use a slightly harder light source than when I am using a variety of studio lights. The change in softness can be as simple as removing one of the internal layers of diffusion from inside the soft box or as dramatic as fitting a key-light reflector dish with barn doors.

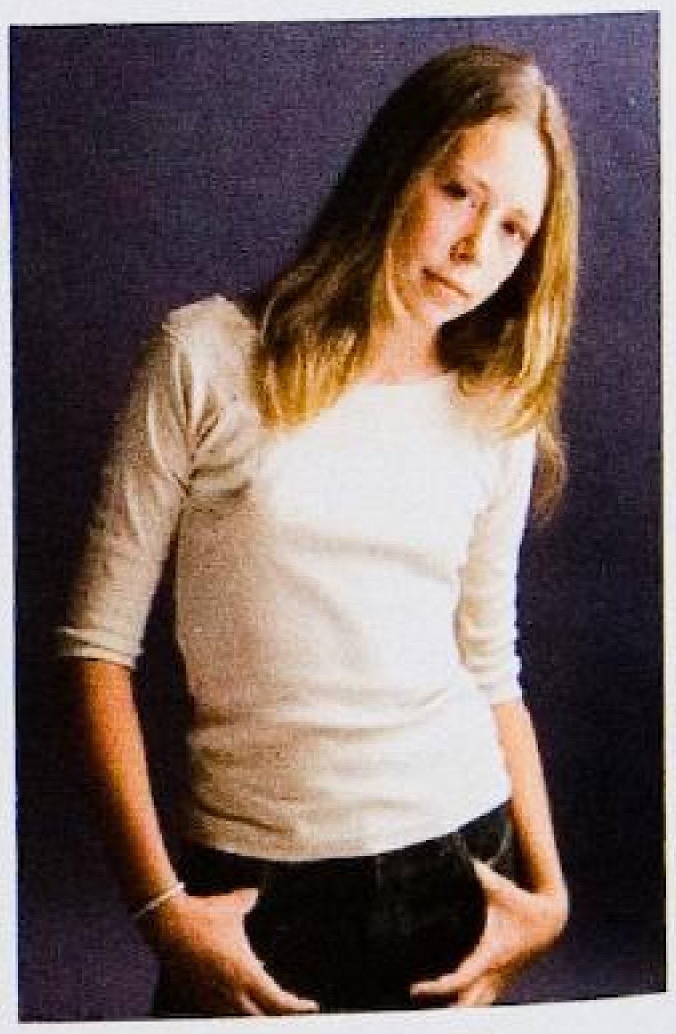
Adding a reflector to increase detail

This set of images was produced using one light fitted with a large soft box. It was positioned at 45° to the subject and, because we are using a dark background, the subject's light-colored clothing helps give a separation to the background.

◀ Soft box only
This shot was taken using a large soft box at 45° to the subject and camera, with the soft box turned slightly toward the camera to feather the light and give a more even illumination.

▶ Soft box plus reflector
With a sunlight reflector underneath the subject pointing back toward the key light, more shadow detail can be seen.

▲ Soft box plus reflector to the side
When you are using a reflector to lift the shadow detail, be careful not to draw attention to parts of the body that would naturally be in shade if the portrait was lit just by the sun. Here, with the reflector on the opposite side to the key-light soft box, the side of the hair and arm in the shadow side are too brightly lit, making the portrait look flat and unnatural.



▲ Soft box feathered toward the background
To separate the sitter from the background slightly in this portrait, I turned the soft box toward the background. Because much of the light is absorbed by the black paper background, I used a key-light reflector dish fitted with barn doors on a second flash unit to illuminate the background from the right, creating a low-key image with more separation between subject and background.

You can see the differences created by using a sunlight reflector panel, either on the opposite side to the key light or under the subject to lift the shadow detail. As you can see, placing the reflector under the subject and pointing back toward the key light gives a much more natural shadow.

Harder portrait with more contrast
For this image, I used a key-light reflector dish fitted with barn doors to create a similar light. Because the key light was unsoftened, the result is a harder-lit portrait that has more contrast and shadow.

tips

- Use barn doors to control the lighting so as not to allow the light to spill around the room.
- Try using a slower shutter speed to increase the ambience in the portrait; this will add a natural warm glow.
- If you struggle to recreate the Rembrandt lighting technique, try fitting the key light with a spotlight or honeycomb attachment, as this will make it easier for you to observe where the light falls.
- Remember that when you are using minimal lighting, you have to be more accurate about where the light touches your subject—especially when the light is unsoftened.

Loop shadow and Rembrandt lighting
These two images show the subtle difference between a 45° lighting pattern and Rembrandt lighting. The 45° lighting gives a loop shadow from the nose to the ear on the far side of the face in shadow and a triangle of light on the cheek furthest from the key light. The Rembrandt lighting pattern gives just a touch of light on the eye in shadow and picks out some detail as well a little of the eye color.

Rembrandt lighting
With a little light hitting the eye on the shaded side of the face, this lighting style is reminiscent of the artist Rembrandt.

45° lighting with barn doors
The 45° lighting pattern gives a shadow from the nose to the ear, creating a triangular highlight on the cheek.

Positioning the reflector
This image shows one of the best positions when using a reflector panel.

Mid-key Lighting

In a mid-key portrait, the overall tonality of the image is a mid tone, with the only area of strong contrast being on the subject. Mid-key lighting is associated more with black-and-white photography than with color.

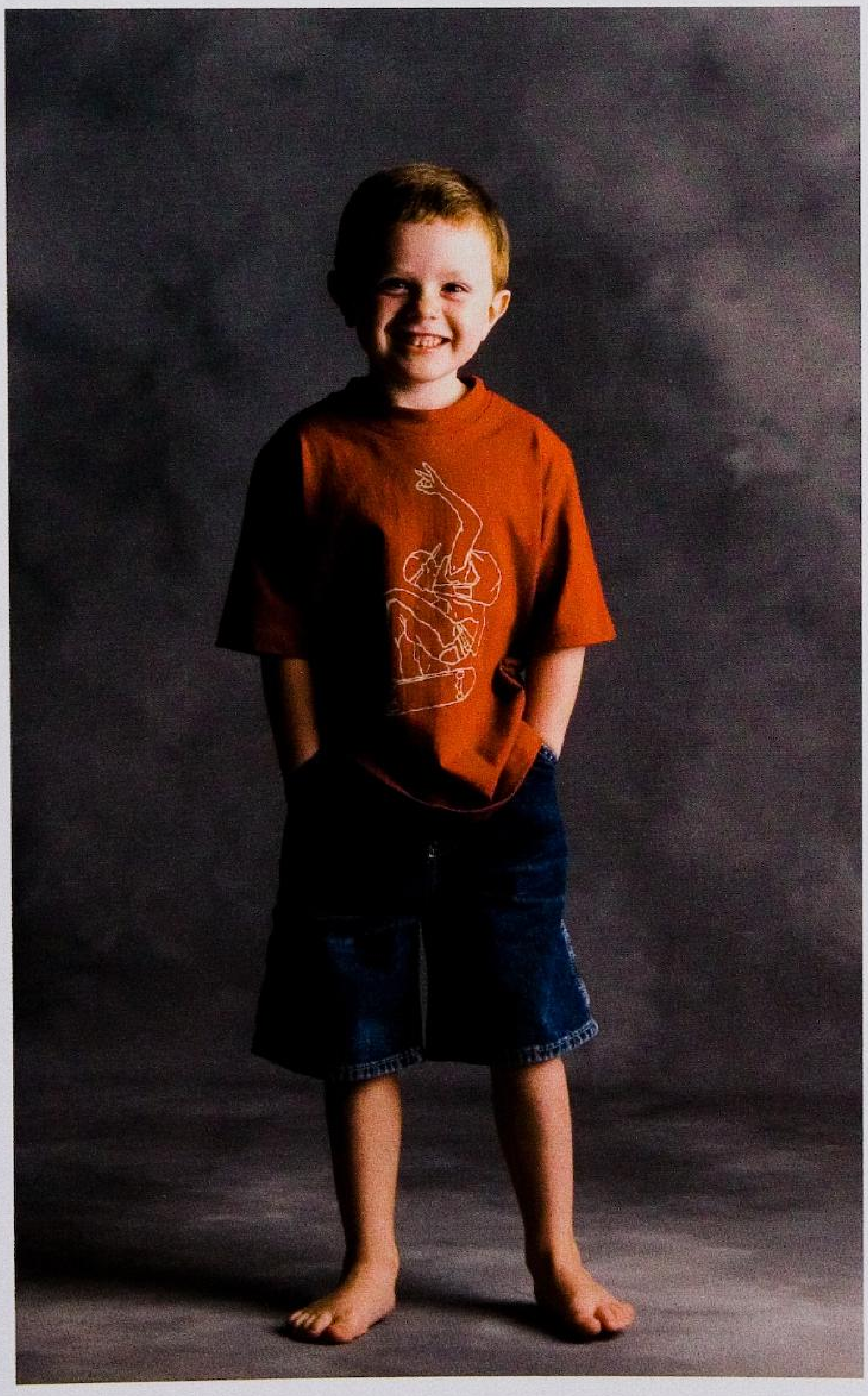
If you use a simple painted backdrop that approximates to an 18 percent gray tone (perhaps a cloud effect, as in the portrait below), a mid-tone portrait can be simply lit, often with just one light acting as both the key light and the background light.

Because the backdrop is a mid tone, you can position the light so that it illuminates only one side of the backdrop. This will result in a natural gradation as the light falls off, eventually ending in darkness.

The exact result will depend on how reflective the background material is; if, for instance, your background is made from a shiny material such as silk or satin, even if it is black, some light will be reflected; if, however, you use a matte material such as velvet, the return of the light hitting it can be reduced by as much as three stops.

When I am using just one light for a mid-key portrait, I usually use a key-light reflector dish fitted with barn doors. This enables me to control not only the spread of the light but also, by using the barn doors to flag off the light, the sharpness of the light hitting the subject.

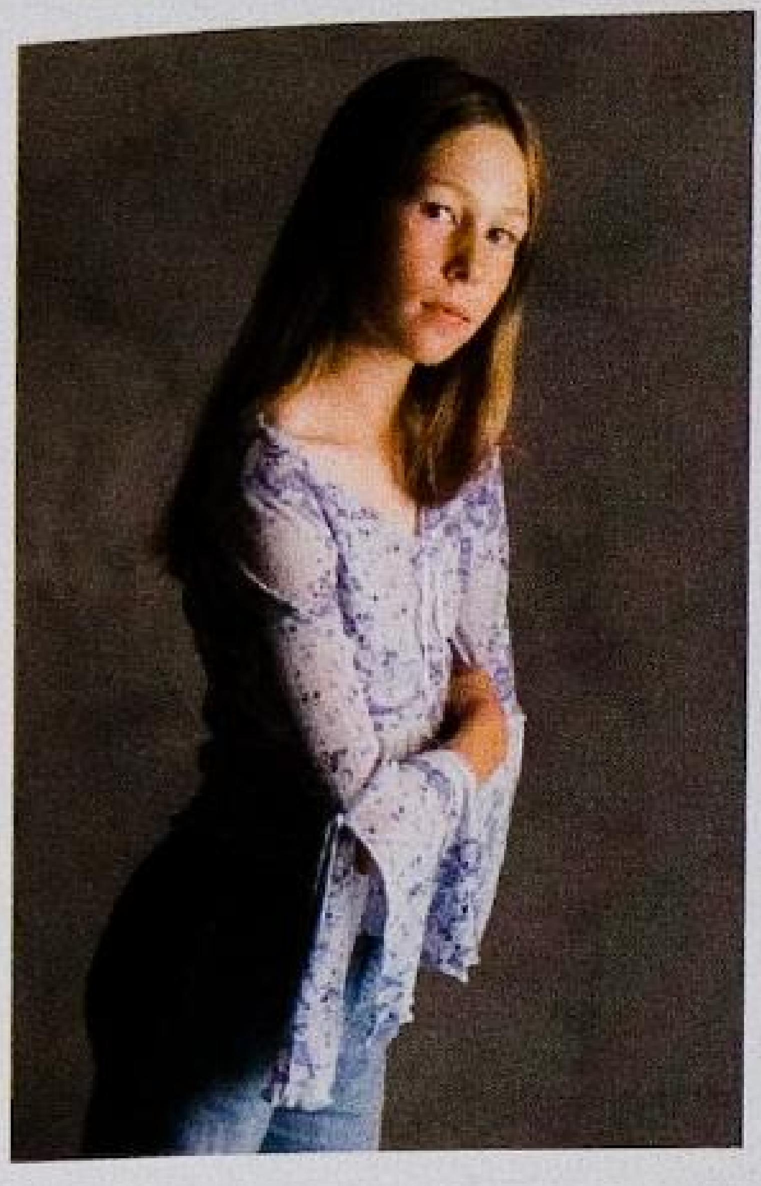
To create a softer image, I position the subject near the background so that the key light, which is fitted with a large soft box, can illuminate both the face and the backdrop.



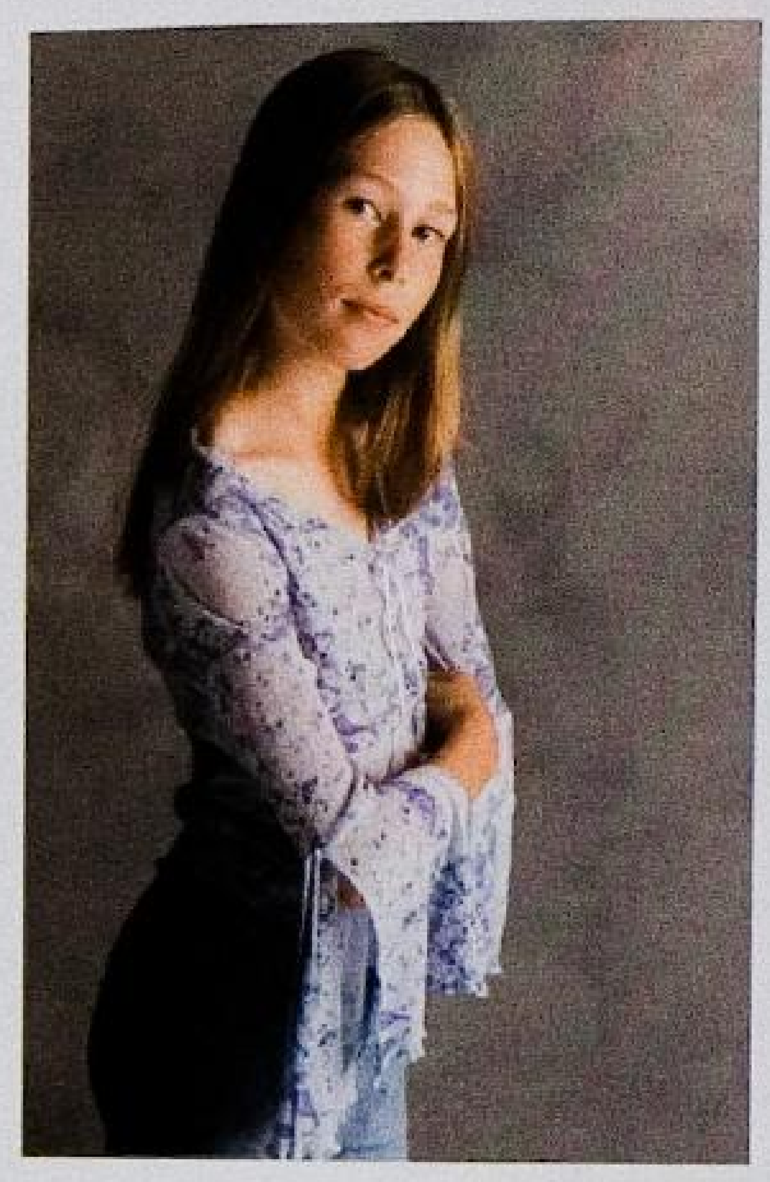
◀ **Mid-key portrait**
The secret of a successful mid-key portrait is to keep the lighting soft and the background neutral. Here the portrait has been lit from the side, with the key light softened by means of a soft box pointing toward the background and feather lighting the subject. If you prefer a flatter style of portrait, position a fill light behind the camera to illuminate the shadow; for the best results, set the fill light to half a stop less than the key light for a brighter image, or one stop less to maintain some modeling on the subject.

▲ **Mid-key set-up**
Here you can see a simple set-up, using just one light with a large soft box. The natural soft spread of the light illuminates both the subject and the painted-cloud background.

Subtle changes
These images show the subtle but noticeable effect of using a reflector in a one light set-up.



Key light on the subject
This portrait shows the effect of shining the key light directly onto the subject.



Adding a reflector
A silver reflector panel beneath the subject on the same side as the key light lifts the shadow area beneath the subject's chin to enhance the jaw line. It also creates a small pool of light, which brightens the face and gives the portrait a natural vignette.

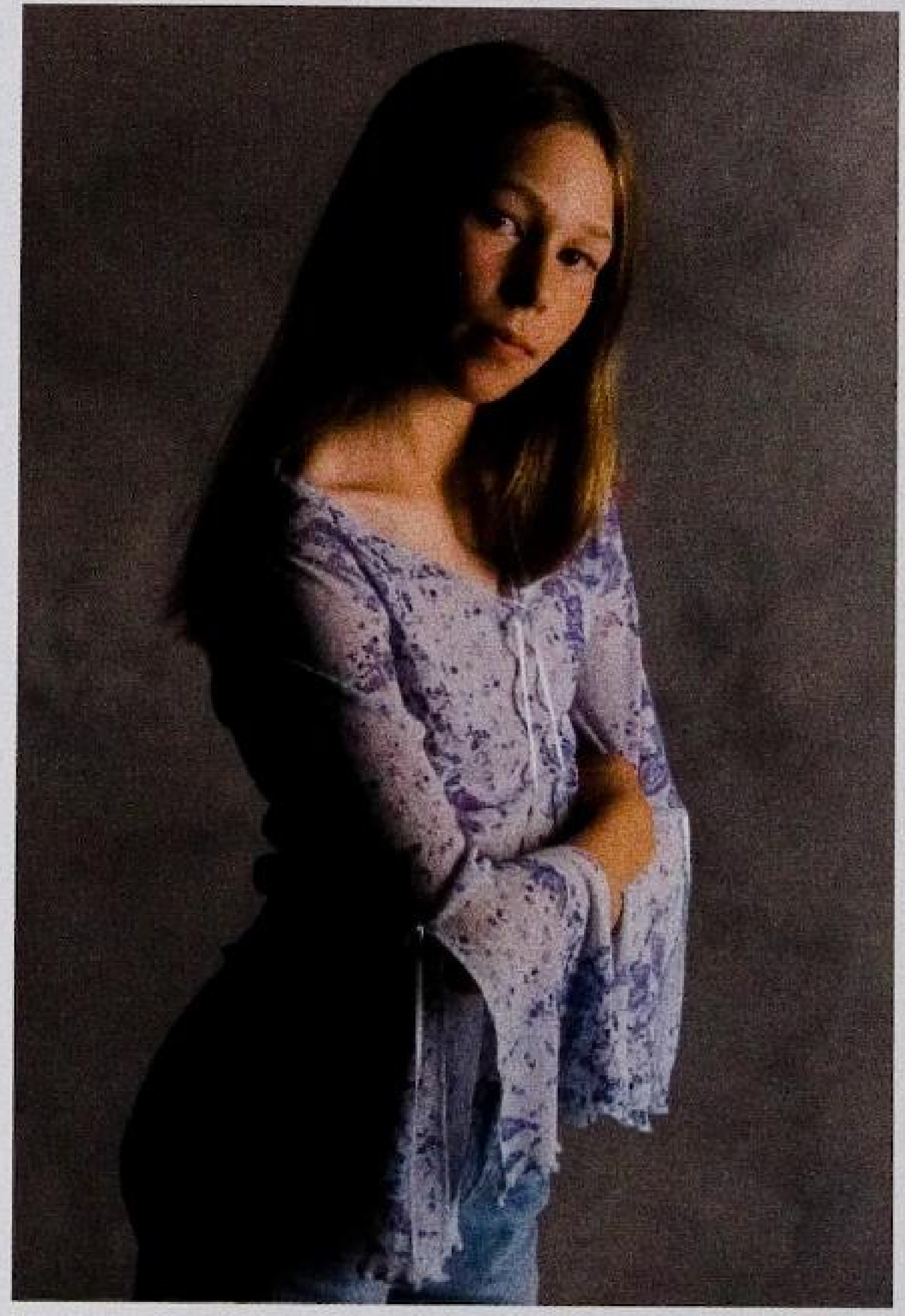
tips

- If the soft box is positioned close to the subject, the natural degradation of the light will make a mid-tone backdrop very dark. To give more light to the backdrop, turn the key light so that just the feather edge of the soft box lights the subject, hence giving more light to the background.
- With full-length portraits, because the soft box is further away from the subject, the tonality of background and subject can be almost the same.
- It is always better to use a fill light as a wash of light across the whole subject, as this will accurately control the areas in shadow.

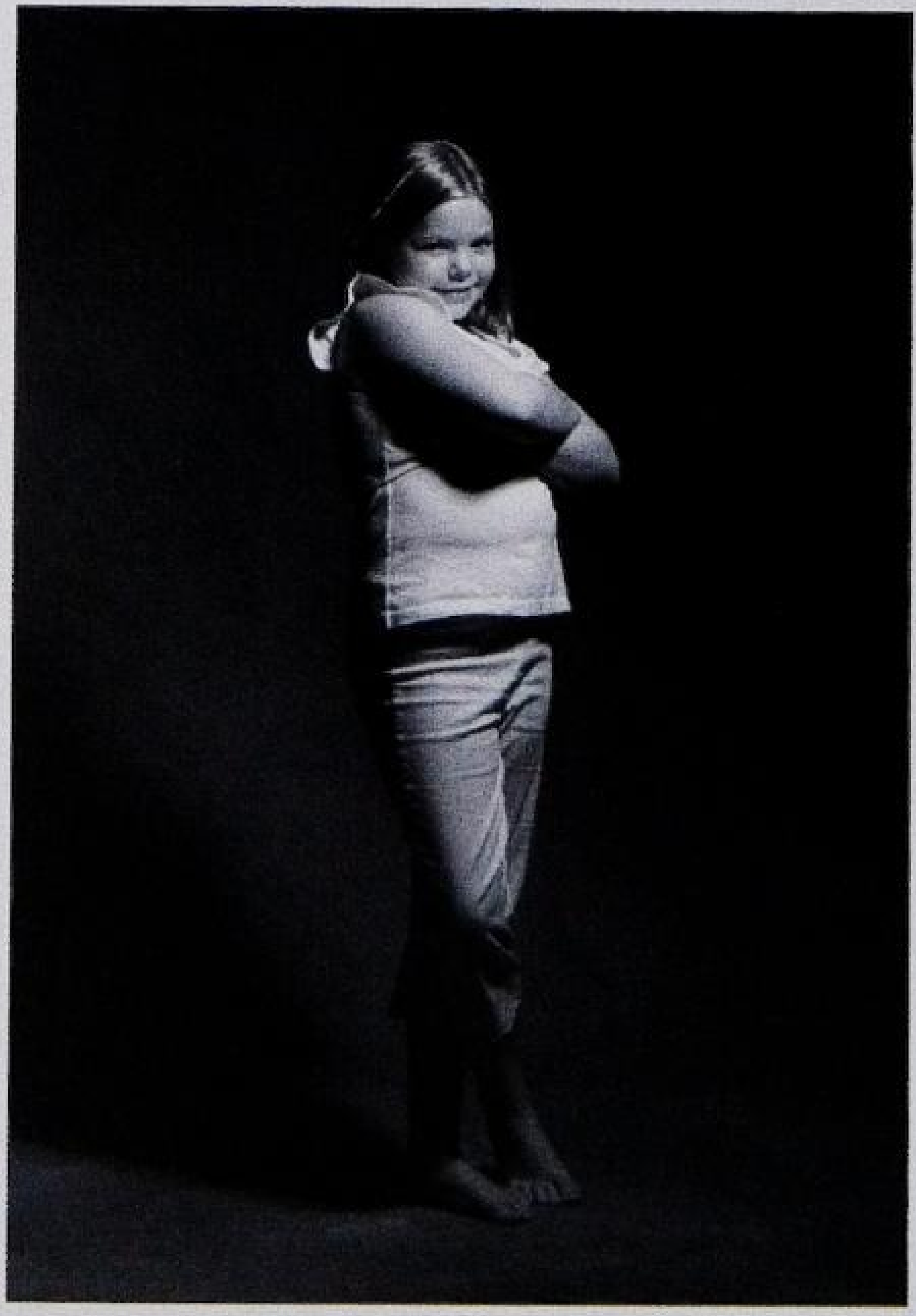
now try this...

Experiment with different materials to find out how their reflectancy varies. Drape them over a background-support system or a curtain rail in front of a window (if you are using a window, do so at night as this will prevent any sunlight from affecting the results).

Set up your studio lighting. Start by simply observing the changes and then photograph them and see how the camera records their color and characteristics. A digital camera is ideal, as you can see the results instantly—but different cameras will record slightly different colors, so include an 18 percent gray card in the shot.

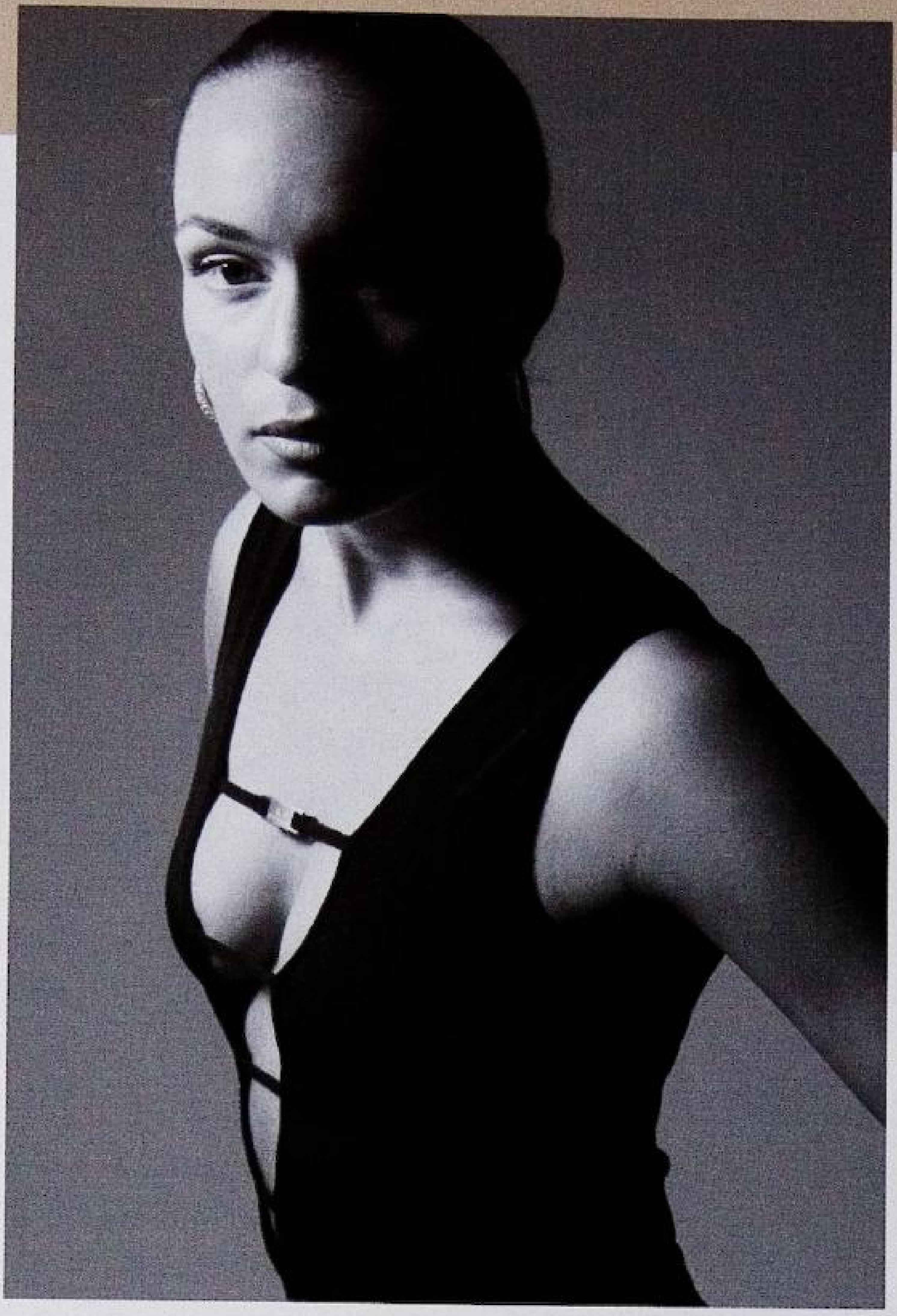


Feathering the light to increase shadow
By pointing the key light toward the background and using only the feather edge of the light to light the subject, you can increase the shadow on the subject. This is because the feather-edge light is so soft in quality that it becomes shadow as soon as it falls off the reflectant surfaces of the face and clothing that face toward the light source.

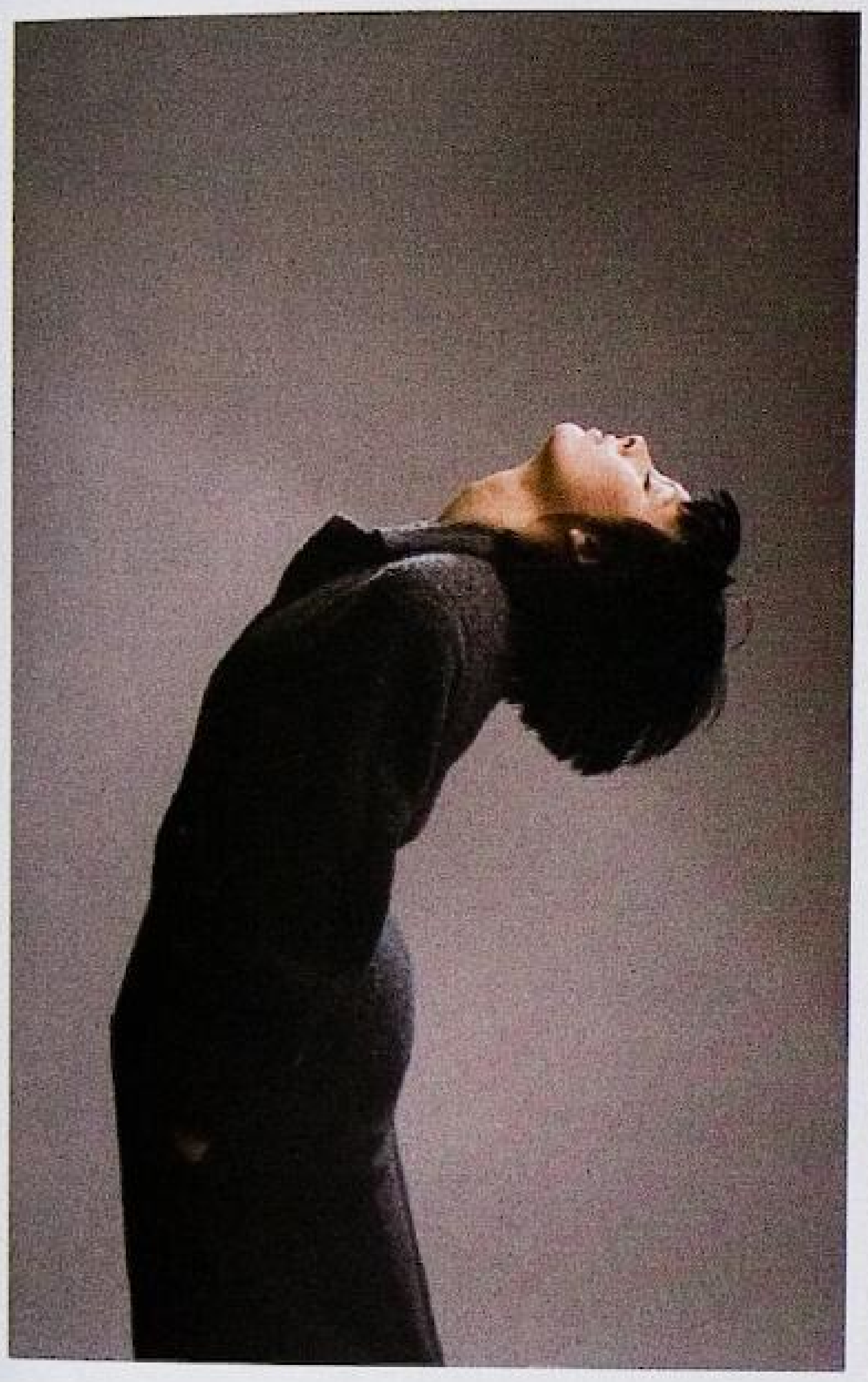


Using barn doors to control the light spillage
In this portrait, the barn door has been closed slightly to take the light off the backdrop, creating an image that is much lower in key.

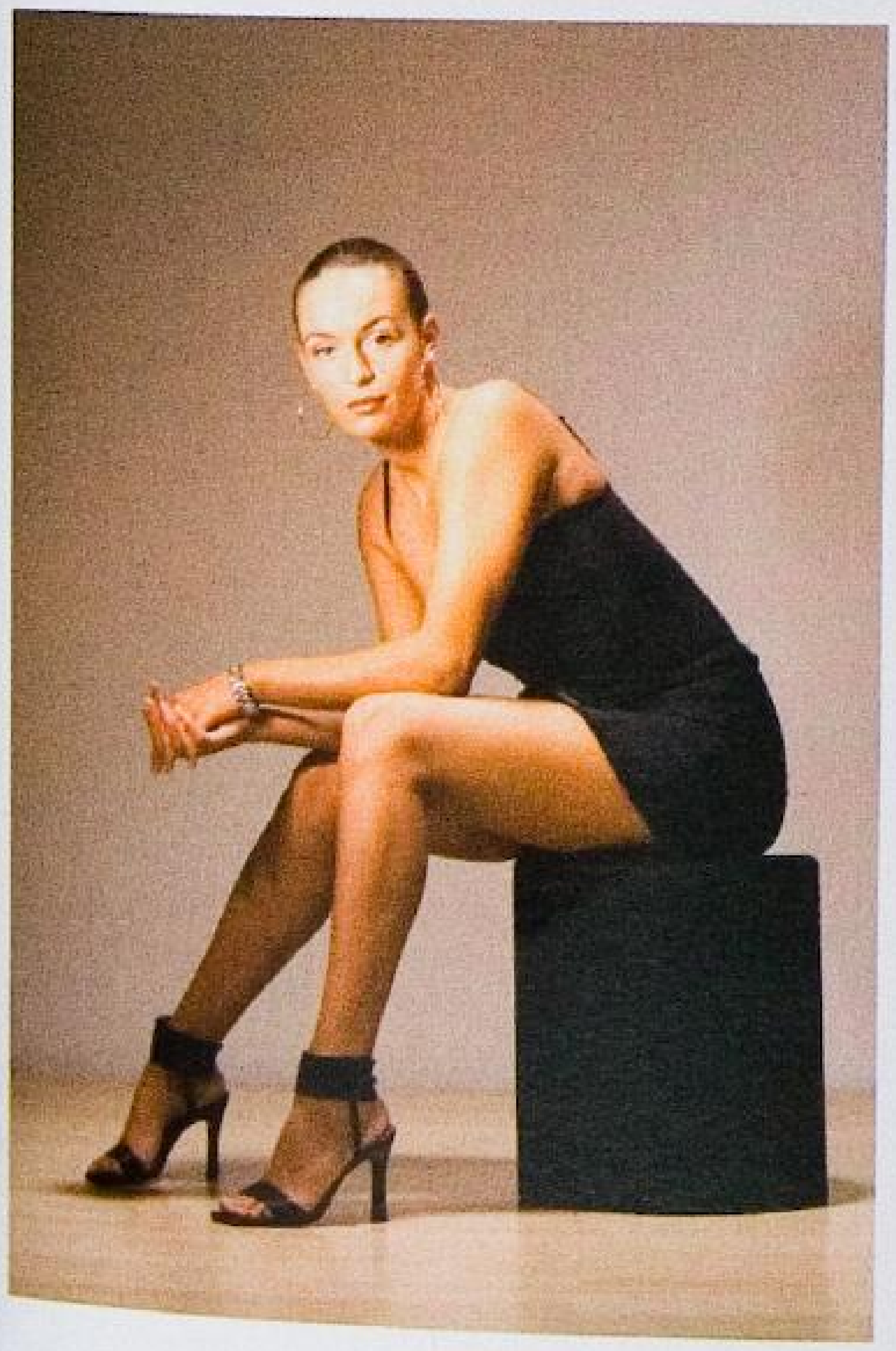
◀ Minimizing specularity
A mid-key image is usually a combination of a soft light source (to minimize the specularity of the highlights and avoid any strong shadows) and a neutral-toned subject, clothing, and background. In this portrait, I used a parabolic reflector on the key light to give a soft quality of light; it also increases the shadow slightly so as to bring an overall neutral tone to the skin and clothing with an accent to the forehead, nose, and eyes. The right arm was closer to the light source and hence naturally brighter, but by cropping tight I have maintained a neutral tonality.



◀ Controlling the key
Even though the lighting on the model's face has an almost Rembrandt-like quality, the overall tonality makes this a mid-key portrait. Just one light was used—a key light fitted with a reflector dish and barn doors. I positioned the key light at 90° to the model, but turned it to slightly illuminate the plain white wall; because the subject was closer to the key light than the key light was to the background, a natural gradation of the light occurred. I also asked the model to turn her head slightly toward the light to put a little light on her shadowed eye and cheek: it is often quicker to move the subject or camera than to adjust the lighting.



◀ Chisel lighting the features
This portrait was shot using a parabolic reflector on the key light, which was positioned directly above the subject; the natural spillage of the light illuminated the background. A hair light chiseled the features, drawing attention to the face.



◀ Even illumination
To achieve the overall mid-key tonality, I used a key light fitted with a reflector dish pointing slightly down on the subject, with a second light, positioned on the same side as the key light but nearer the background, to give some illumination to the white wall. The second light was also softened with some diffusion material to minimize any hot spots from the reflector dish. It is always difficult to give even illumination to anything more than a full-length portrait; for small groups, evenly light the background one stop lower than the key light to get the effect.

Photoshop manipulation
Using Photoshop, I made several copy layers around the subject's face and body and used a directional motion blur to give a judder effect. The manipulated image was then selectively cropped, copied, and flipped, with the background above the subject being stretched to increase the height. There was a highlight at the point where the images were joined together in the center; this was then smudged to create the lightning bolt.

◀ Three-light set-up
This portrait demonstrates the use of a three-light set-up for a mid-key portrait to give extra separation and a three-dimensional feel—a parabolic reflector as the key light, a hair light to give separation, and a background light with the addition of a Tri-reflector.

High-key Lighting

If you are looking for a clean and simple image that exaggerates the dynamics of the pose, high-key lighting is a must. The lighting set-up is slightly more complicated than those we have seen so far; more lights are involved and you also need to control the spill and the contrast.

The term "high key" is used to describe an image that is light in tone overall, with a clean background that is brighter than the subject. High-key head-and-shoulders portraits are simple to achieve—but the more people there are in the photograph, the more care you need to take.

The high-key set-up that I use consists of five lights: a fill light fitted with a large soft box to give a soft lift to any shadow; a key light fitted with a large hex-oval soft box, positioned at 45° to the subject and camera in order to give modeling on the subject; a hair light positioned on the same side as the key light, but from behind to give highlight to the hair and shoulders; and, most importantly, two background lights—one on either side of the background—to evenly illuminate both the background and the floor.

There are two main problems with high-key portraiture: if the background is not lit enough it can end up looking muddy; if the background is overlit, on the other hand, you can get a halo effect, which causes a slight flaring of the light around the subject.

Common pitfalls

There are a number of common mistakes that photographers make in high-key lighting set-ups, all of which can be easily rectified once you know what to look for.

Muddy background
This is the most common mistake with high-key lighting: the background is underlit and looks muddy, rather than a clean white. Always set the background lights two stops higher than the key light.

Wrong power setting
If you use colored gels on background lights, increase the power on the background lights—otherwise, the portrait becomes more mid key than high key. If the power of the background lights is at its maximum before you add the gels, decrease the key-light power setting (and the hair and fill light settings, if you are using them) and adjust the lens aperture so that you still get a two-stop difference between the key light and the background lights.

Flare around the subject
When the background is overlit, as here, you get a flaring and softening effect.

Overspill from the background light
Be careful not to spill colored light onto the subject, as this gives an unnatural skin color.

tips

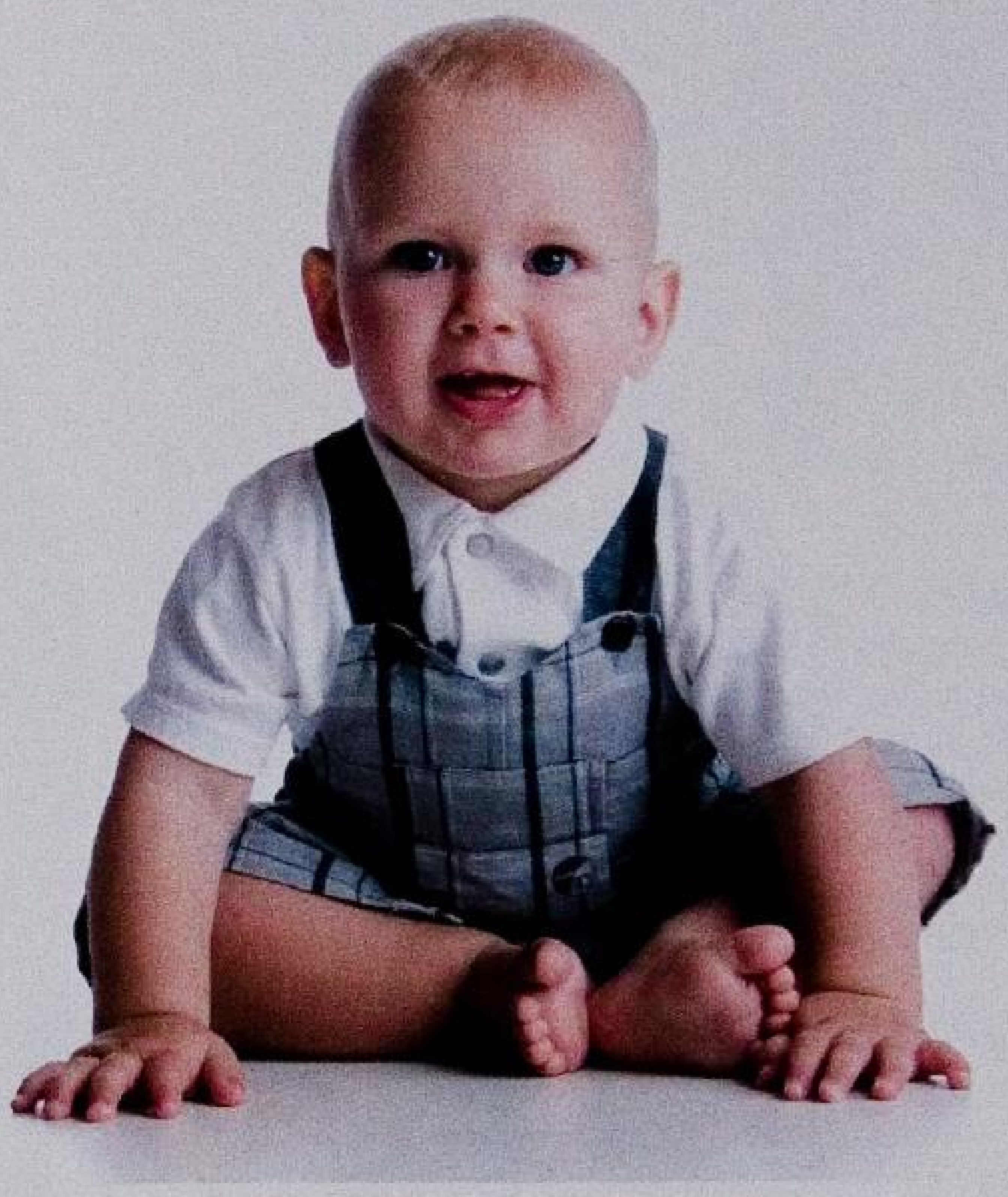
- Use a roll of white background paper for a seamless background.
- I use a combination of a white paper roll as the background with white vinyl flooring. This makes cleaning easier and to avoids wasting paper.
- If you are using colored gels for a pastel high-key shot, decrease one of the background lights for a different effect.

Fill light
Increase the power of the fill light to lift more of the shadow detail, setting it to one stop below the key-light setting. Soften the fill light to give a non-specular, soft spread of light across the whole plane of the subject.

Key light
The key light is usually softened with a large soft box to give diffused shadows; alternatively, you can fit it with a reflector dish to give a sharper light, although this will throw a shadow from the subject away from the key light source. Remember to set the key light one stop higher in power than the fill light so that, even when the key light is softened, there is contrast which creates modeling on the subject.

Hair light
Although it is not essential, I like to use a hair light in high-key portraits in order to give shine to the hair and shape to the head. I set the light at f/8 for dark hair and f/4 for light hair, as the light from behind appears twice as bright.

Background lights
Lighting the background is the secret to high-key portraiture. Position a light on each side pointing inward, so that the edges cross in the middle. When this is done correctly, the whole background should be evenly lit; make sure you don't end up with something that looks like two car headlamps. The background lights should be set two stops higher than the key-light setting—so if the key light gives a reading of f/8, set the background lights at f/16. If you do not have enough power, just remember that you need a two-stop difference—so, for instance, if you can only light the background to f/8, reduce the key light in power to give a reading of f/4 and set the lens aperture accordingly.

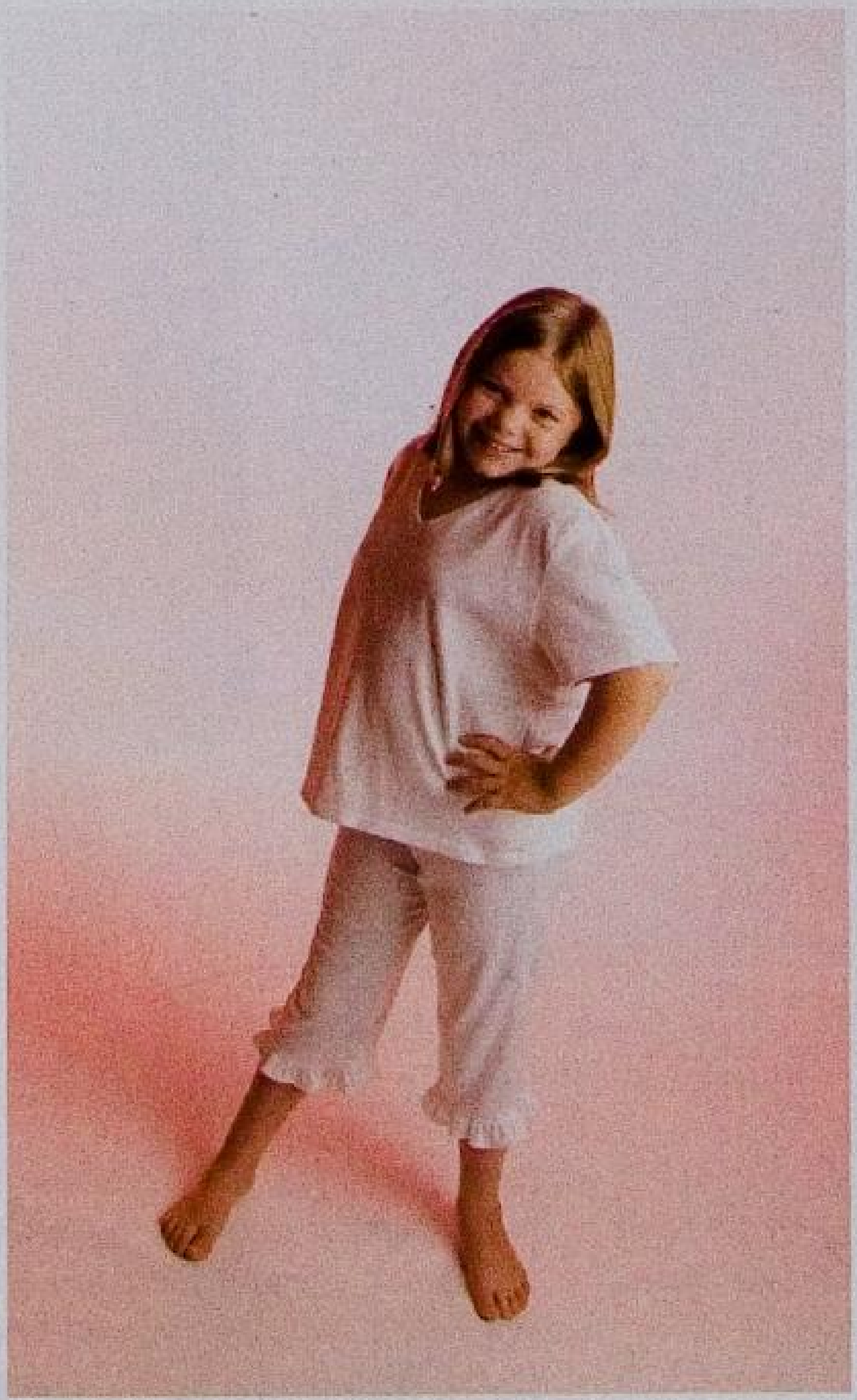


▲ **High-key portrait**
For a portrait of a young child you need less space and can get away with using less equipment. Although I used a standard high-key set-up for this shot, the child is so small that he could have been lit with just two lights—one light fitted with a large soft box to light the subject and floor, and a second light fitted with a large soft box to light the background.

now try this...

Practice shooting simple high-key images against a white background or painted wall in a very bright room. If you do not have a very bright room or access to studio lighting, use a small room that is evenly lit from above, as this will provide you with an overall tone from which to take a meter reading. If possible, use a separate light source to light the subject from the side or from the camera position; this light should be set 2½ stops lower than the overall room illumination reading. Only do this as a last resort, because it will involve slower shutter speeds, which will probably necessitate using a tripod or having to put up with subject blur.

If you do not have a white background, use two or more large white bed sheets as a floor cloth and backcloth. Make sure the sheets are not creased, as this will create shadow and spoil the effect.



◀ **Pastel portraits**
When you add colored gels to the background lights, you get pastel shades because of the way the light reflects off white—a lovely variation on the traditional high-key portrait.

Correct background light setting
This portrait was shot using the classic high-key set-up, with the background lights set to give two stops more exposure than the key light. It is essential that the key light is correctly positioned, as it provides the modeling on the subject's face and body and illuminates some of the floor.

Controlling the key
As usual, I lit the background so that it was two stops higher than the key-light setting, but then I changed the lens aperture to give an increase in exposure of another stop in order to exaggerate the child's already fair complexion. I also printed the shot for greater contrast and finally tweaked the Images curve in Photoshop. This is a favorite high-key technique of mine, especially for black-and-white studies of children, as it simplifies the whole image—particularly when the image is tightly cropped.

Creating shadow on the subject
A high-key portrait does not mean flat lighting. Here, the key light is positioned at almost 90° to the subject and we have something approaching split lighting. Light has reflected back from the white wall, floors, and background into the shadow side of the body. To control this, you could introduce a black subtraction panel just out of shot on the shadow side.

High-key portrait
This cheeky portrait uses the classic high-key set-up of two background lights to create a clean, white space. The key light was positioned to the side, creating shadow on the subject.

Changing the composition
Increasing the amount of white background in Photoshop by increasing the canvas size around the subject has enhanced both the high-key element of the portrait and the overall composition. Sometimes you capture the perfect expression on a frame in which the subject occupies slightly more of the image area than you would wish, so this is a simple quick fix.

tip

✦ When taking a high-key shot from a different camera angle, remember that other parts of the studio, such as the floor and ceiling, become visible. The white background on my studio floor often gets scuffed during a busy day, but a little Photoshop work can clean the floor area around the client's feet. First, open the image and adjust the white point by sliding the adjuster to the left to make the image brighter and create more contrast. Then select the Erase tool, click the Erase to History selection on the top bar, and erase over the subject. This allows you to regain the contrast that was on the original image when you first opened it. Now that you have increased the contrast, you can clean up any other marks that have not been lost, as well as any muddy whites on the background around the subject.

High-key background; low-key clothing
High-key portraiture is usually associated with light clothing, but everything depends on how much white background can be seen. A key light and a background light, both fitted with a large soft box, allow you to create a clean white background. To maintain the high-key effect in this shot, I positioned the hair light, fitted with a honeycomb to stop any flare, on the opposite side to the key light and near the background just out of shot. It puts an accent light on the slightly shadowed side of the face to give extra separation.

Adding texture to the background
In this shot, I added texture to the high-key setting by using long lengths of white tulle; this also prevents the subject from looking as if she is floating in empty space. The tulle is lit by both the background lights and the key light, which is pointing down toward the subject. Tulle not only reflects light, but also holds some texture; it is ideal for covering up the white silk bean bags on which we pose young babies.

High-key Portraits Using One Light

If you think trying to shoot great high-key portraits is difficult , try shooting high-key images with just one light. Once again, controlling the light on the subject is the secret.

The background
The background for a high-key portrait can be a roll of white paper, a big sheet of uncreased white fabric, or a painted white wall. As with other types of high-key portrait, you have to give two stops more light to the background than to the subject—so it is easiest to use a wide aperture.

The light
Fit the studio flash with as wide a reflector dish as possible or even a bare bulb. Direct the light toward the background, and position it far enough away to light the background and floor as well as the subject. Place a diffusion panel between the subject and the flash to diffuse the light source and reduce the quantity of light; remember that there must be a two-stop difference between the background and the subject.

Full-length portraits are more difficult to achieve with this technique than head-and-shoulders shots, as you do not have full control of the key light as it scatters and falls off. I use this

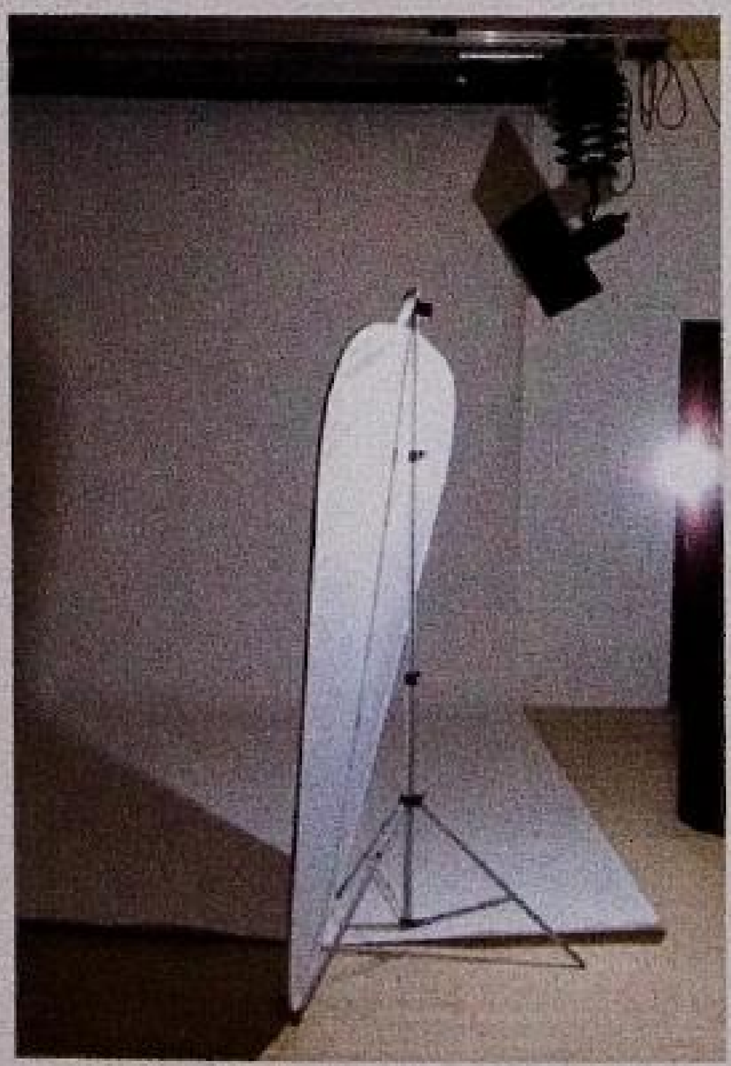
tips

- Make sure the diffused light illuminates the subject's face two stops less than the background.
- You can simulate this technique on location on a dull day by using a portable flash, but the result will depend on the power of the flash.
- A high-key shot on a beach, with the subject's back to the sun, is a great effect. Use a portable flash through a diffusion screen to achieve a similar result.

Positioning the light in a one-light high-key set-up
With minimal equipment, your ability to control light is crucial. Placing a diffusion panel between the light and your subject is a great way of creating soft, even light with no ugly shadows.

▲ Positioning the subject
Place your subject in the shade of the diffusion panel to reduce and soften the light.

▶ Positioning the diffusion panel and the key light
Suport the diffusion screen on a stand to diffuse the light onto the background.



▲ Muddy vignetting of the background
In this image the shadow from the diffusion panel is visible, which makes the left-hand side of the background look slightly muddy.

technique on location using a white wall, placing a diffusion panel between the subject and the sun; this gives an almost identical result to the studio, as the darker the subject the lighter the background. If necessary, I can put more light onto the face by placing a white reflector panel between the camera and the subject.

now try this...

In a room with the lights on, place some white cotton or linen fabric in front of a lamp without a shade to diffuse the light. Observe the softness as well as the subtractive quality.

Position your subject in front of a large window and place a large reflector or white card at 45°. Note how the result is similar.

High-key portrait using one light
The diffusion panel, which is positioned just out of shot, diffuses the harsh light from the studio flash to create a soft but directional light source, allowing the majority of the light to point toward the wall and give a two-stop difference between the amount of light hitting the subject's face and the amount of light reflected from the wall.

Creative Lighting Techniques

Once you have mastered the basics of photographic lighting, you will soon strive to use light in a more creative way. There are a number of accessories that allow you to shape and control the light; more importantly, with a little imagination and perseverance, you can create portraits that have a distinct style and mood. This chapter sets out some simple techniques that will change the way you see and use light for ever.

Bare Bulb

When a light bulb is softened by a shade or given direction by a reflector dish, we are manipulating its direction as well as its contrast; in other words, we are controlling the light. When the direction or softness of the light source are not manipulated, the technique is called bare bulb—for obvious reasons. The result can be very dramatic.

tips

- Avoid using multiple bare bulbs, as this increases stray light and will definitely cause some lens flare.
- If the light source cannot be moved and you are unable to flag off flare with your hand or a piece of card, try shooting from a slightly higher viewpoint.
- Use a lens hood to prevent flare.

Flare
Flare is a common problem with the bare-bulb technique.

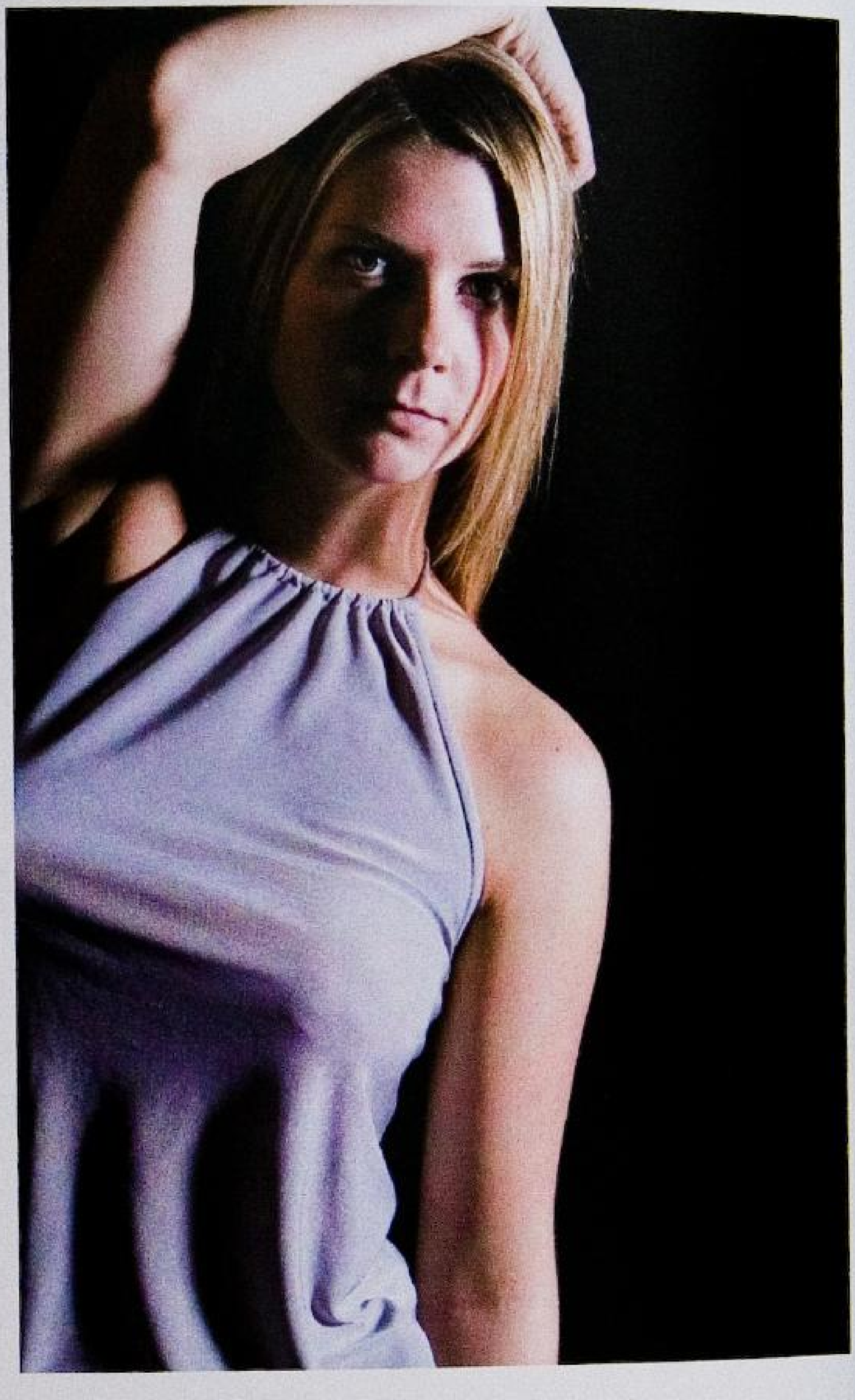
Avoiding flare
In this image flare has been avoided simply by moving the bare bulb slightly higher.

The easiest way to demonstrate this technique is to remove the shade from a hanging pendant room light. As you will see, the light creeps into every corner and crevice, reflecting off surfaces that allow it to and creating black hollows in the shadows. This effect is very similar to a bright sunny day and I treat it in the same way, placing the subject further away from the source for a subtle portrait and near the light source for long, strong shadows.

I often use the bare-bulb style when I am using a portable flash, as it lifts some of the detail in the shadows, which helps to complement the subject in sunlight.

However, the bare-bulb technique can give us problems in contrast, specularity, and spillage. It is usually better to position the subject either very close to the bare bulb, so that the exposure and contrast on the subject will be similar to the brightness of the bulb, or several feet away so that the light source is out of shot and does not dominate the portrait.

Another common problem with the bare-bulb technique is lens flare, which is caused by stray light reacting with the lens and giving a round or hexagonal pattern. You can help to prevent it by fitting a good-quality lens hood to the front of the camera lens, or by moving the bulb slightly higher, although you should never be afraid to use flare for its creative effect.



▲ **Softening the contrast**
Even though a bare bulb gives a harsh quality of light when it is close to the subject, the further away it is, the softer it becomes. This is because light is able to spill over a wider area, reflecting off all surfaces and lifting the shadow areas.

▲ **Unsightly shadows**
An undiffused and uncontrolled light source can cause such problems as shadows on the face, as the light is blocked by the hair, and burnt-out areas on uncovered skin. To overcome this, make sure that clothing or hair does not interrupt the path of the light, or introduce a diffusion panel between the subject and the bare bulb to lower the contrast.

Controlling the spillage
This portrait was taken with a bare bulb, but with black-out panels positioned on either side of the key light to minimize light spilling onto the background and eliminate flare.

now try this...

In a darkened room, remove the shade from a lamp and observe how strongly and intensely the light falls on a subject that is placed near by. Now move the subject away from the light source and see how the light becomes softer.

Spotlighting

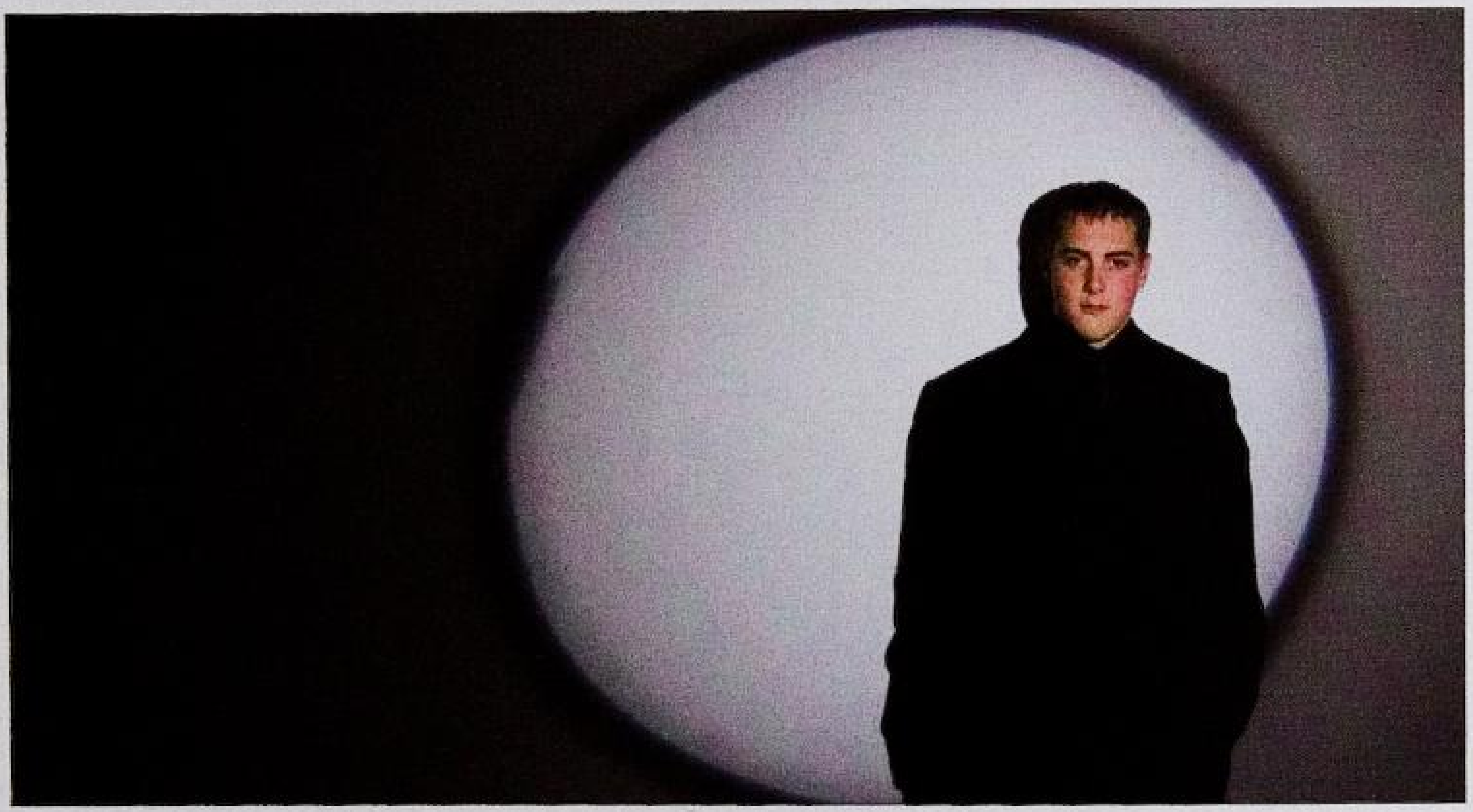
Using a spotlight to light the subject with a defined pool of light gives instant impact and a theatrical mood to a portrait.

There are several accessories that give a spotlight effect. A snoot attachment, or cone, is often confused with a spotlight but it is nothing more than a tightly controlled light source. A snoot can give a spotlight effect when it is used very close to the subject or when it is used as the only light source in the portrait. It is often used as a hair light, because it not only controls the light but it also allows a natural fall-off onto the subject, giving a wider, softer effect. A snoot can also be used to highlight a specific area of the subject, such as the face. I use a snoot mainly to give a background a lift, especially colored or dark backdrops.

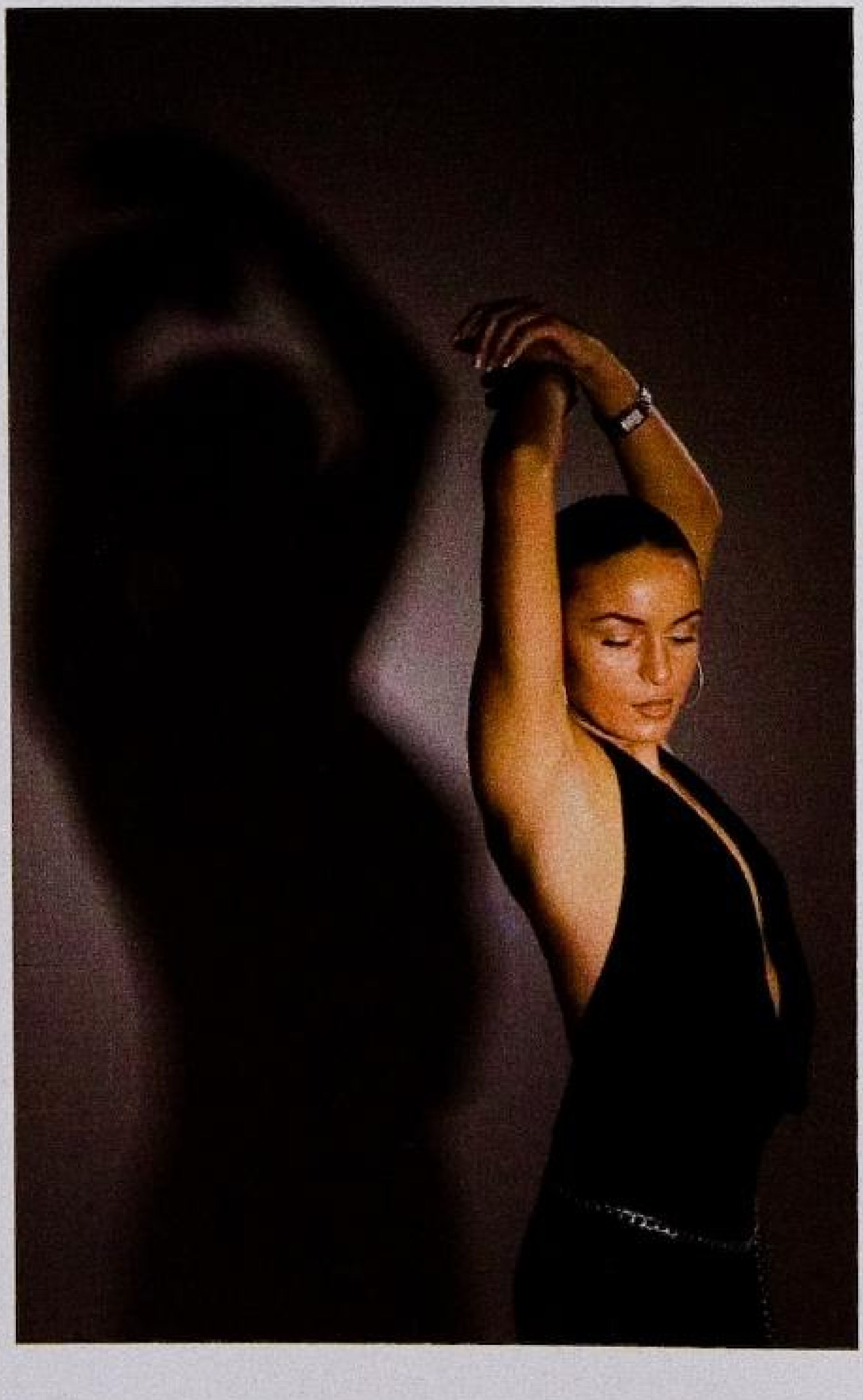
Theatrical-style spot lighting can also be achieved with a gobo (see page 18), which can be used to give different patterns on either the subject or the background, such as a church window or light falling through a forest.

However, only an optical focusing spotlight or a focusing spot attachment can give a perfect round concentration of light with a sharp edge and fall-off. You can choose whether or not to focus the spotlight in order to change the effect. A good-quality focusing spotlight also allows you to mask off the light internally to give different effects and shapes of light.

When you use a focusable spotlight in a portrait, the first decision you have to make is whether to use it to light the subject or to light the set. When you use a spotlight to light the subject, it is generally better if the background and setting are dark, as this adds to the stage-like effect. When you use it to light the background—especially when you are using a gobo for a pattern or effect—take care not to allow any other light, including the key light, to spill onto the background, as this spoils the effect.



▶ The spotlight
This portrait demonstrates the simplicity of the spotlight effect: a focusable spotlight attachment fixed to the key light gives a very dramatic effect when used on a white wall. The sharp edge between highlight and shadow is instantly achieved, giving a near-perfect sphere.



▶ Using shadow for effect
When you are using just one light fitted with a spotlight attachment, you can create a dramatic effect by casting a shadow from your subject onto a light background. Position your subject close to the wall or backdrop, and place the light lower than normal and to the side of the subject.

▲ Accenting the background with a snoot
The blue background is lit by only a snooted light to give a natural gradation in color.

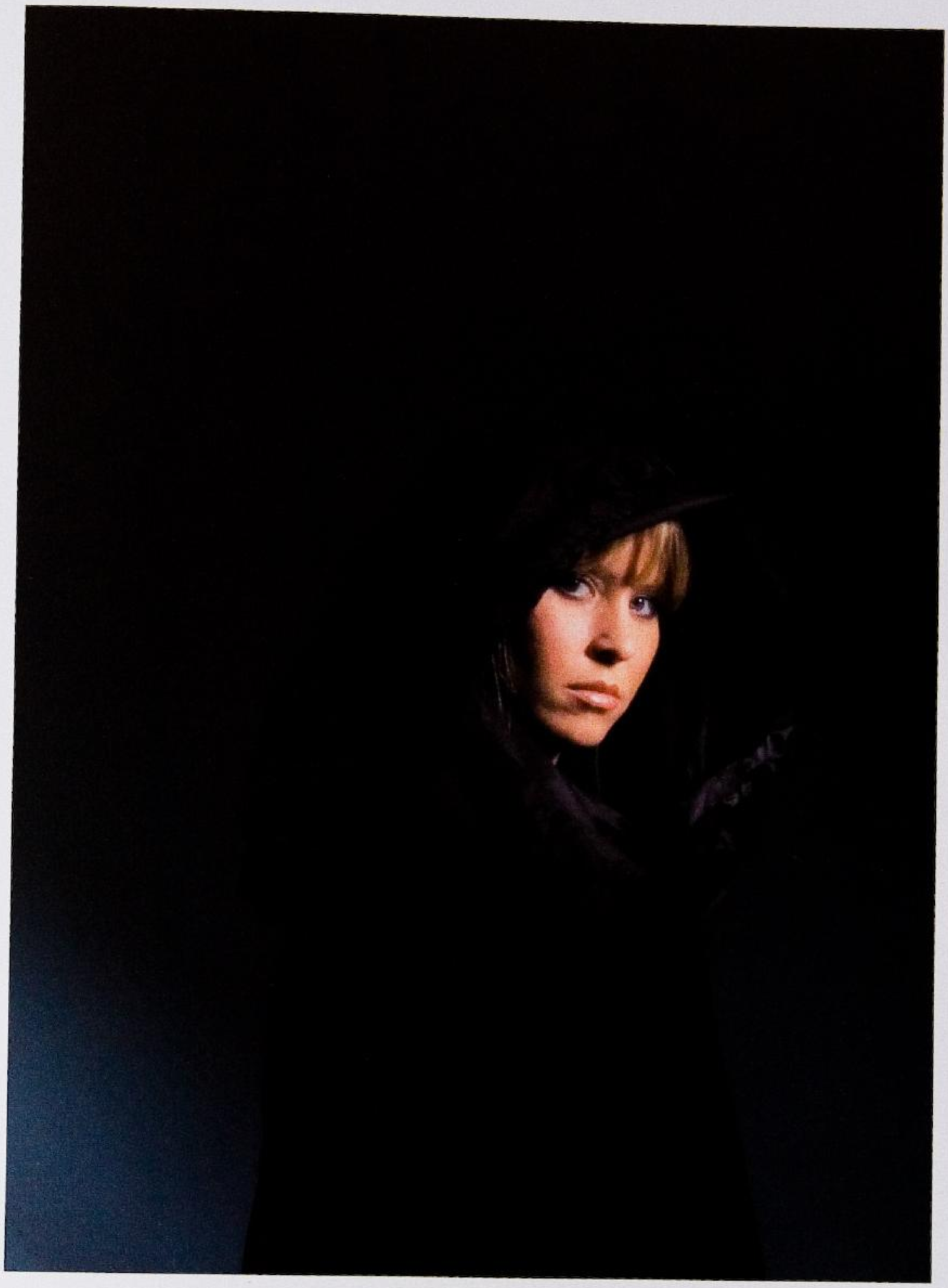
Using a spotlight to change the mood

This sequence demonstrates how a simple spot-lit portrait can be changed into something a little more feminine, with more mood.

Spotlight
I positioned my subject in front of a white wall and focused a spotlight on her face and upper body. The background looks gray, and the portrait is rather harsh.

Lighting background and subject
Here I lit the whole background, including the subject, with two background lights, each fitted with a reflector dish and a red gel. There is not a clear enough distinction between the subject and background.

Spotlight and background lights
Then I added a spotlight attachment to the key light, to white light the subject. As the spotlight attachment gives a sharp edge to the light, no light spills onto the rest of the background, thus giving a concentrated but attractive color to the background—but the subject's skin tones appear normal.



▲ Accenting the face with a snoot
For this shot, I directed a snoot at the model's face so as not to illuminate too much of the cloak. I then positioned a large soft box, set one stop lower than the snooted light, on the right-hand side to lift detail in the shadows. A background light fitted with a key-light reflector was positioned on the floor behind the model pointing toward the blue paper background; as you can see, it gives a natural gradation to black, giving the effect of light on the horizon at night.

now try this...

In a darkened room, point a focusable flash light (torch) at a light wall. Then introduce a variety of objects to interrupt the beam, creating a pattern. Note that the closer the object is to the background, the sharper the shadow is. Try moving the flash light around the subject and observe the difference. You can create a similar effect with strong sunlight coming through a small gap in a drape.

Accent Lighting

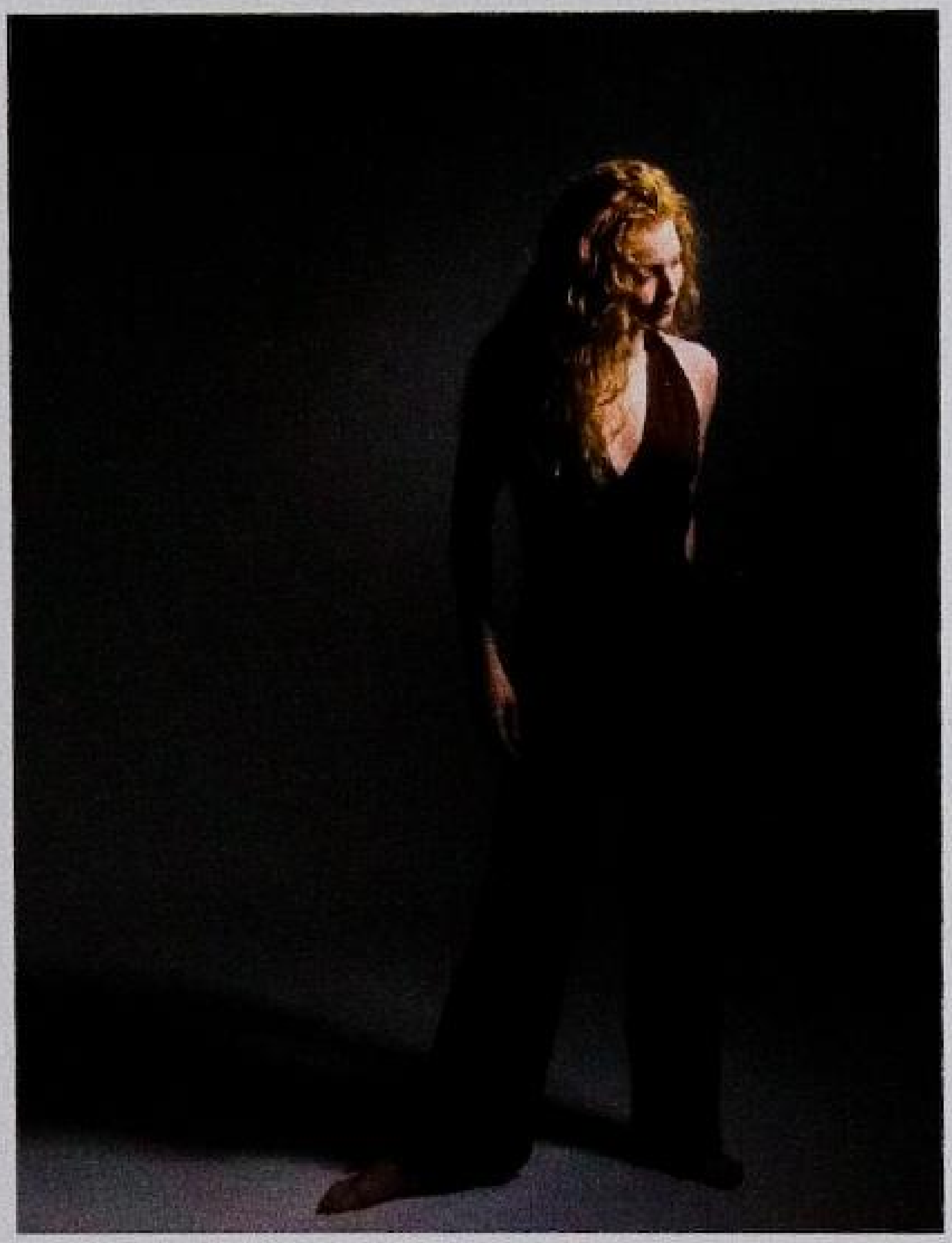
An accent light is used mainly to draw attention to a specific part of the subject's face or body. It makes a dramatic statement in a contemporary image and is perfect for male portraiture.

By adding an extra light to the basic 45° set-up, you can increase the brightness and contrast of a specific part of the portrait, thus making that part more dominant in the image. Accent lighting is ideal for portraits of men—especially for subjects with black skin, as it increases the natural skin highlight even further.

An accent light, sometimes referred to as a chisel, is normally achieved by using a snoot or a spotlight attachment to tightly control the light source. Set the accent light to a maximum of half a stop more than the key-light soft box and aim it directly into the face. This exaggerates the highlight and specularity, drawing the viewer's attention directly to the face, as our eye is always drawn to the brightest point.

An accent light can also be used from 45° behind the subject to give an exaggerated highlight on the cheek and the side of the face. However, problems can arise from unsightly shadows. Because the light is coming from behind, you have to reduce the power setting to one stop below the key light, as light from behind appears twice as bright.

You can add more accent lights, but they should be used for specific reasons so as not to complicate the set-up. Whenever possible, the accent light should come from the same side as the key light to give the impression that the light is coming from a single direction.



Using a hair light as an accent light
In this portrait, the hair light has been honeycombed to give an increased specularity to the highlight, particularly on the five planes of the face. As a result, the key light, which is at 45° to the subject's face, now appears much lower in intensity.

tips

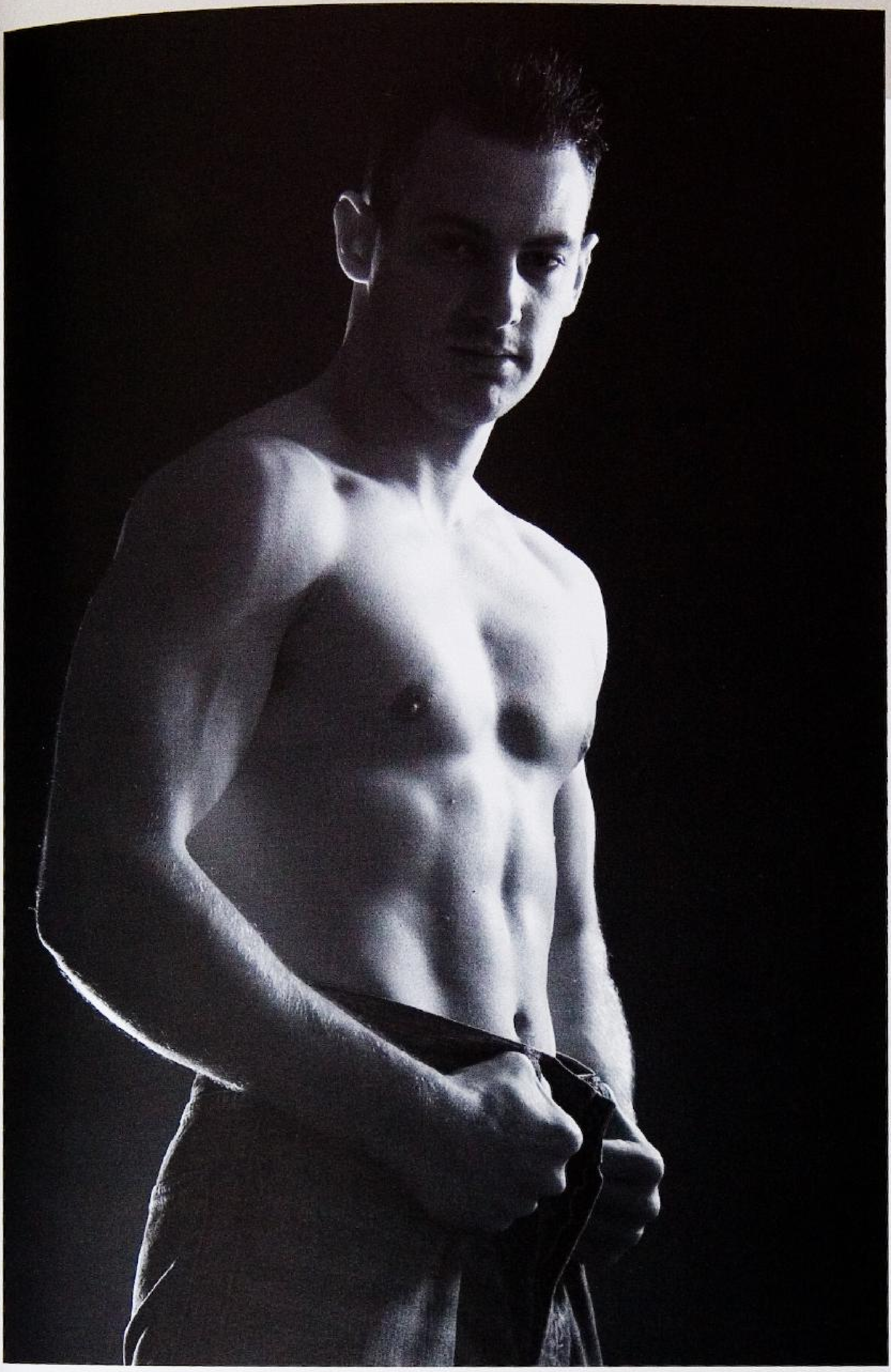
- ✦ If your subject has facial spots or blemishes, an accent light will slightly bleach out these imperfections.
- ✦ In flat lighting conditions, use an accent light to highlight specific areas.

Enhancing the 45° set-up
This sequence shows how adding an accent light to the 45° set-up creates depth and roundness.

Soft box only
The 45° set-up produces a soft overall effect.

Soft box plus honeycomb accent
When a second light fitted with a key-light reflector and a honeycomb to control the spill is added, the face takes on more depth and roundness.

Soft box and honeycomb accent plus hair light
The addition of a hair light serves to separate the top of the head and the shoulders from the blue background and helps to create a more three-dimensional feel.

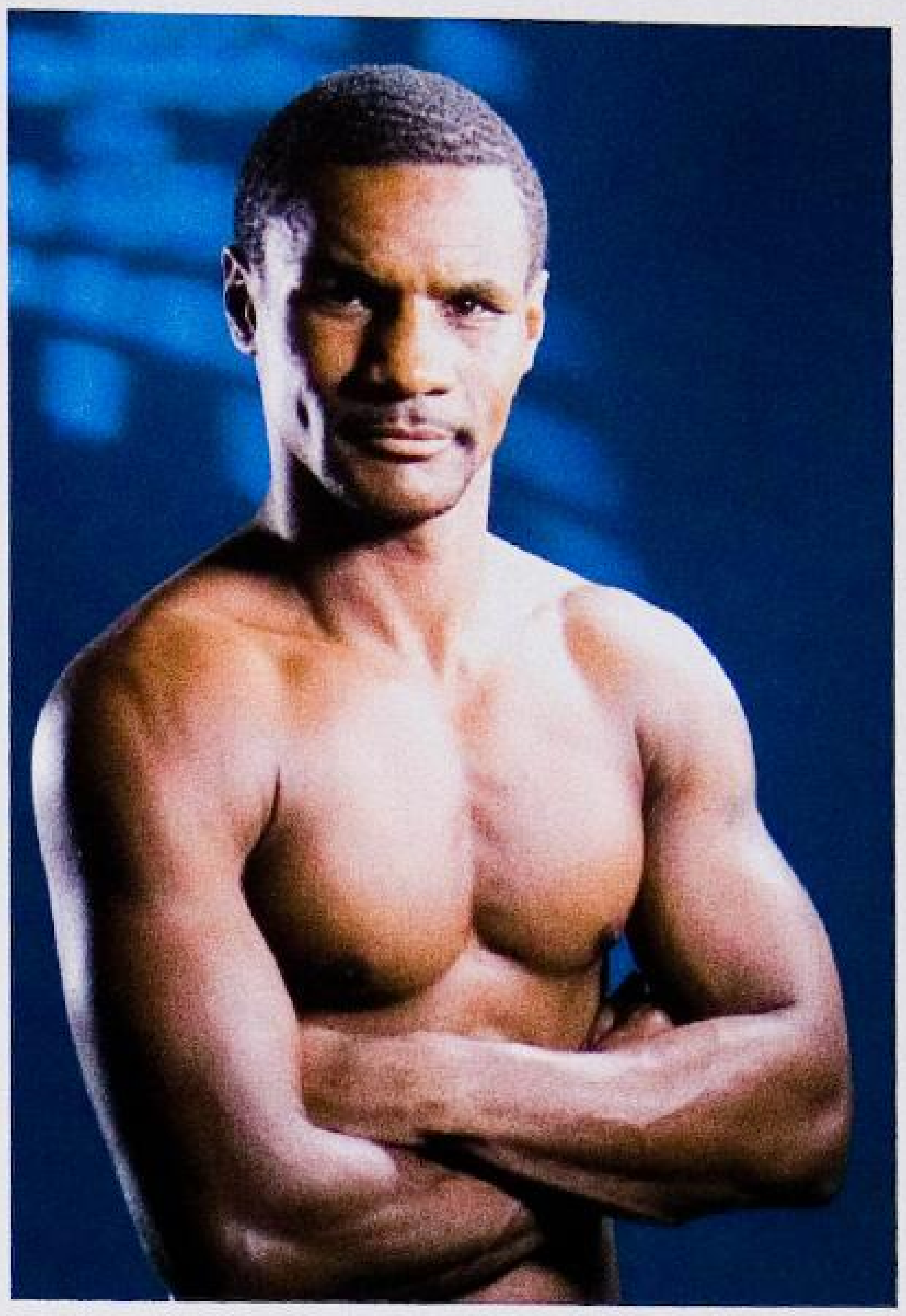


Accenting a muscular body
A hard accent light is ideal on a muscular body, as it shapes and defines the muscle tone. In this portrait, two accent lights were used, in addition to the key and hair lights. The main accent light was positioned very close to the hair light; it was fitted with a key-light reflector dish and barn doors to control the spillage, lighting the chest and giving drama to the side of the subject's face. The second accent light was positioned on the floor and behind the subject, pointing directly at the body to give a very sharp white outline to the arm and the shadow side of the head.

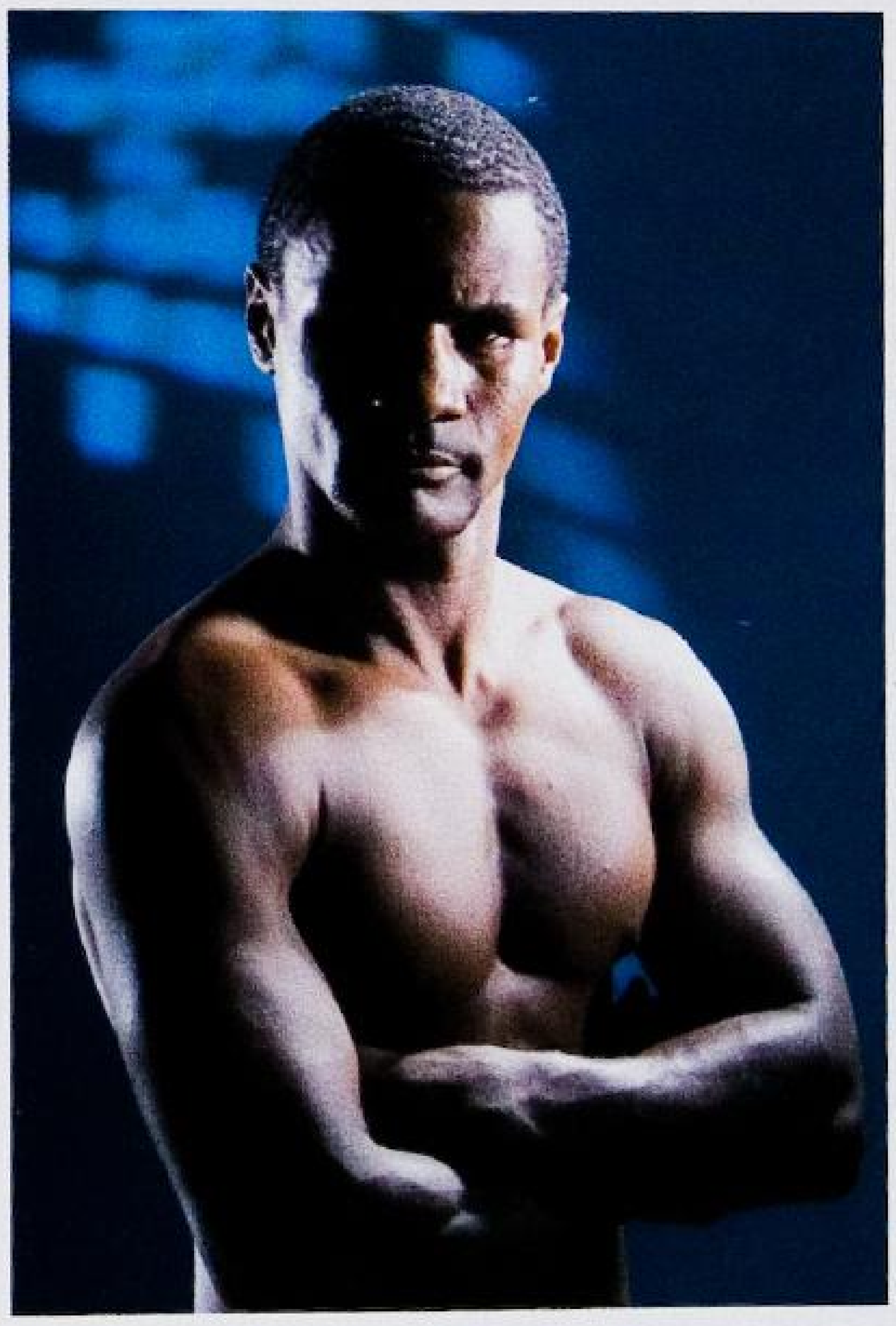
now try this...

In normal room lighting, hold a focusable flash light (torch) close to the subject and point it at your subject's face from an angle of 45°. Note how it exaggerates the nose loop shadow.

Now move the flash light to directly in front of the subject's face, a little higher than the eyes: note how the whole face is exaggerated. The effect is similar to a spotlit portrait, but the face is accentuated.



Using several accent lights
This powerful portrait shows the impact of using hard, directional light on black skin. Three accent lights were used to create highlights on different parts of the body—the face, the front torso, and the arm and side of the face in shadow. All three lights were placed behind the subject to exaggerate tone and shape. Each light was set to the same power, giving an even illumination.



Chiseling the tone of the body
A large hex-oval soft box was used as the key light in this image and the same three accent lights as in the shot above were used to chisel out tone. A spotlight fitted with a gobo of a city lights scene gives extra drama and interest to the background.

Using Gels

Colored gels are an easy and inexpensive way of boosting your creativity. They can be used to color the background or the subject, or both.

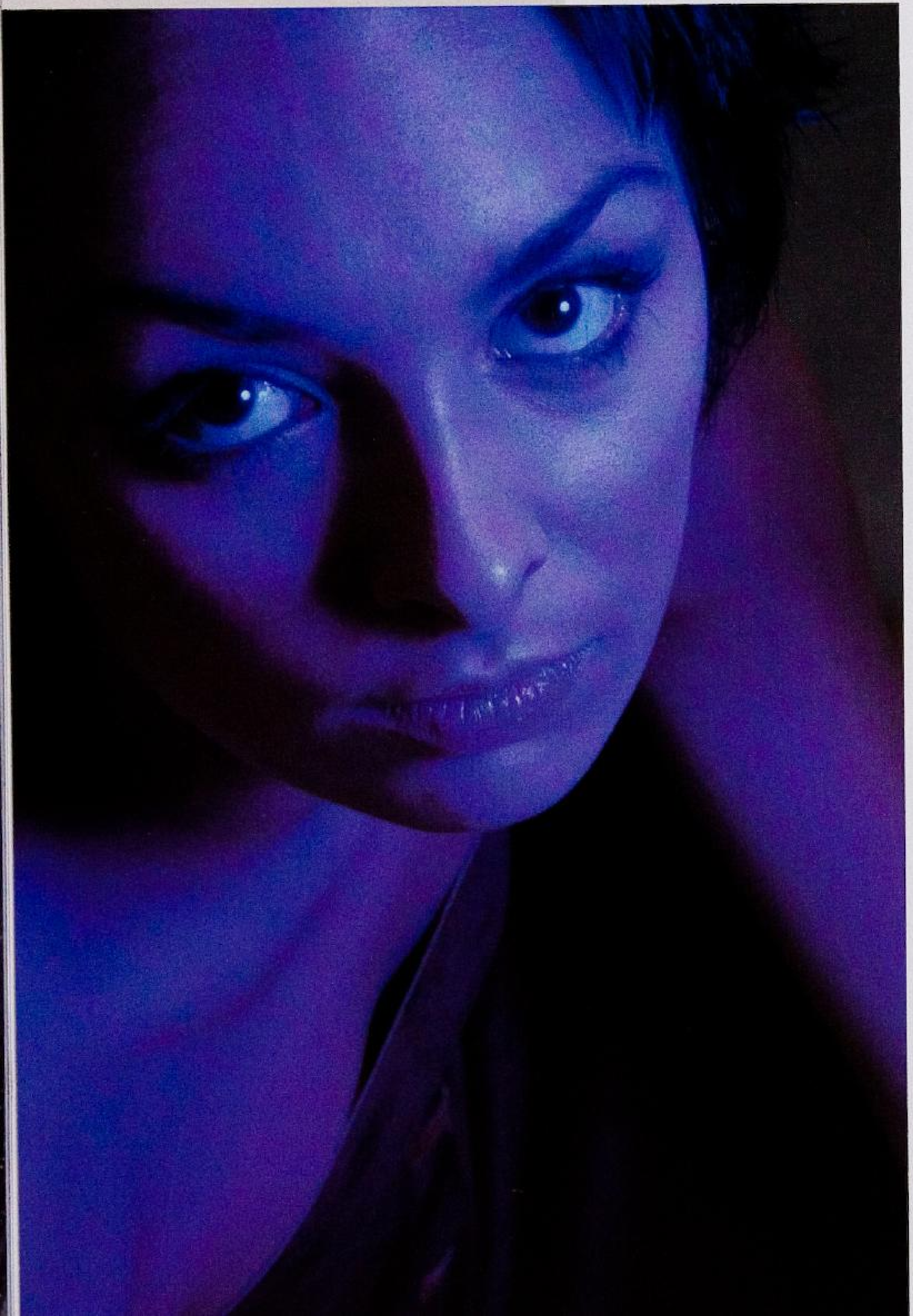
Heat-resistant acetate gels are readily available in many colors. They can be attached to reflector dishes by means of a double clip—a simple and effective way of changing background and subject color, as well as being able to blend several colors together. To stop the colored light spilling over onto the subject's face and body, use clip-on barn doors.

Using gels on the background

The most common use of colored gels is to change the tone and color of the background. Choose the color carefully, so that it complements the subject's clothing. The color determines the mood of the shot: the wrong choice will result in a distracting background rather than a harmonious portrait.

Coloring the subject

Using gels to color the subject can make for dramatic-looking images. When I shoot this style of portrait I tend to adopt one of two very different styles. The first is to shoot a very low-key image, using the color for its impact alone—perhaps to harmonize with the décor of the room in which the portrait is to be hung.



◀ Flooding the subject with color
Flooding the subject with colored light from the acetate gel creates a hauntingly atmospheric portrait.

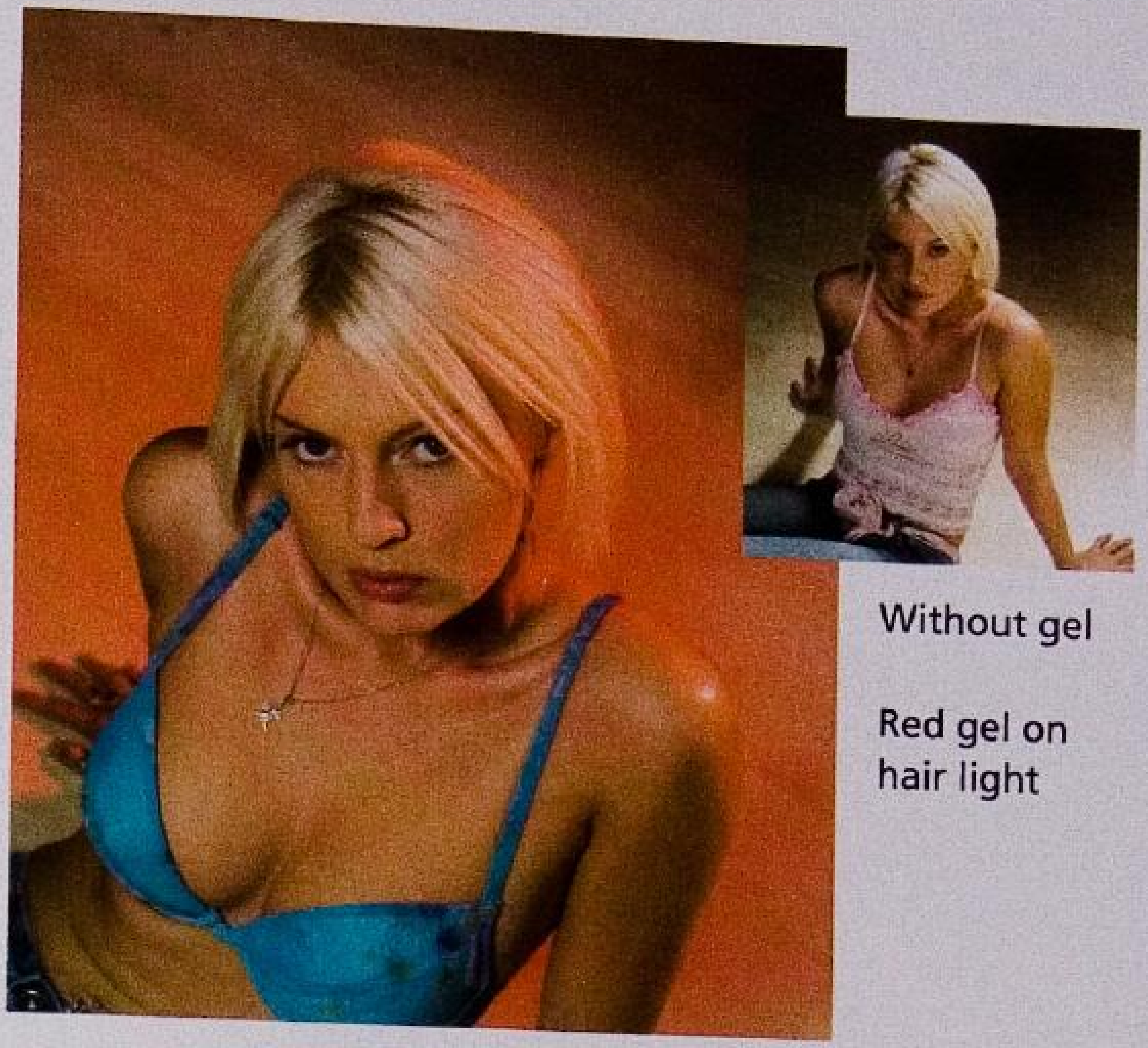
▲ Overexposing the highlights
Overexposing the image gives greater contrast, allowing for a whiter highlight while keeping the dramatic color.

Background gels
This series of portraits demonstrates how different gels change not only the background but also the mood, even though the power of the background light was the same in each shot.

The second technique that I use is to overexpose the highlights by one stop, thus bleaching out a lot of the color from the gel illuminating the skin and giving a white highlight on the five planes of the face. The image will now have more contrast, particularly in the highlight areas, while still giving the portrait an attractive overall hue.

now try this...

In a darkened room, with a table lamp as the only light source, place some red fabric over the lampshade; as you will see, the whole mood of the room changes. Place your subject near the light source so that he or she is lit by the colored light from the fabric. Lift away a small part of the material, so that the subject's face is lit by the uncolored light from the lamp, and note how this dramatically changes the subject's appearance. Now decide whether you prefer to white light the face or to light it with color.



Without gel

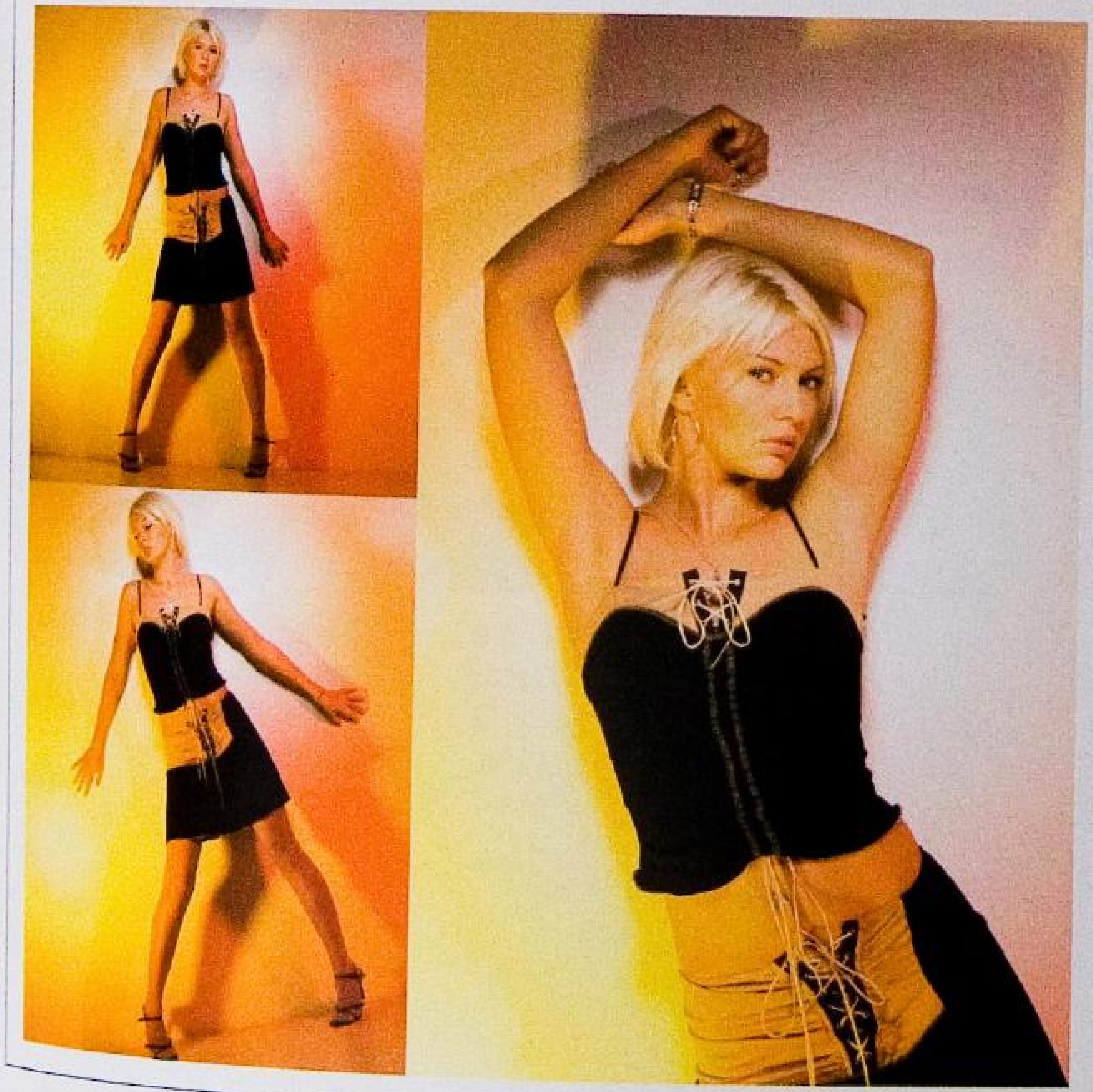
Red gel on hair light

▲ **Colored gel on hair and background**
These shots show the effect of using a reflector dish with a colored gel as the hair light; the reflector dish allows for more spillage, but it is controlled so as to light the floor behind the sitter and change the mood of the shot.

Coloring the subject

For these shots, I positioned two lights on floor stands, each with a reflector dish and a different gel. I pointed them up toward the face so as to create shadows on the wall behind.
After metering directly toward the gel-covered lights and adjusting them to the same luminosity, I added a third light, which was fitted with a honeycomb and pointed directly at the face, and metered for the same f/8. This prevents the face from being colored by the gels.

The set-up



tips

- ✦ Use clip-on barn doors on the light to which the gels are attached to prevent the colored light from spilling over into areas that you don't want it to hit.
- ✦ Avoid the key light spilling onto the background, as this will reduce color saturation.
- ✦ In order to see exactly what the colored light from the gel is illuminating, switch off the key and fill lights.
- ✦ Try placing different-colored gels together to mix color from one light source.
- ✦ Check the light power setting, as different colors absorb different amounts of light. Blue requires the most power and yellow the least.
- ✦ Gels on a light background give pastel shades, while gels on dark background give a saturated color.
- ✦ Mix two or three colors together over one light to blend colors—but avoid having too many colors in one shot.
- ✦ Add clean light white light to the face with a snooted or honeycombed light source. This gives drama without making your subject look unnatural.

Ring Flash

The ring flash is a classic lighting accessory and has been used by fashion photographers since its invention. It eliminates nearly all shadows.

A ring flash is a unique full-frontal light that produces a near shadowless effect, even when the subject is placed against the background wall. The ring flash is donut shaped with a hole in the center, allowing a camera to be mounted on a bracket behind the flash unit; the camera lens is then positioned in the middle of the circular aperture and its flash tubes.

The Bowen's ring flash that I use produces enough flash power to freeze most action shots and can give two refined lighting effects from two different reflector attachments: one has a white internal finish to give a sharper light, while the second is an opal diffuser to create soft shadows, making it an ideal light source for direct lighting.

With both of these attachements, the shadowless effect is achieved by the way the direct light wraps evenly around the whole subject. The only way that you could mimic this effect using conventional studio flash units would be to place the flash units all around the camera, as well as above and below it.

Ring flash obviates the need for nearly all other lighting—and this is one of the reasons why it is one of the most sought-after products in the studio. Once the camera is mounted on the ring-flash bracket, the two become one. Even though the lighting is flat, the design of the unit gives an intense specularity to the light that hits the subject, eventually falling off equally all around. This very special quality is unequaled in a portrait.

As a variation on the ring-flash technique, you can move the subject away from the background so as to light the background separately; this increases separation and gives a more three-dimensional effect. You can also add accent lights to the face or hair, but the ring flash lighting effect will be lost very quickly.

There are some drawbacks, however. Ring flash is expensive, because it needs its own power source, and because of its size and weight it is not fully portable. The unit is usually mounted on a tripod and is used mainly in a studio environment.

Background choice
Your choice of background can dramatically change the image, as you can see in this portrait where a metal Venetian blind has been used. The ring flash reflects off the metal, separating the subject and background.

Ring-flash effect
The ring flash gives a very sharp highlight in the pupil and illuminates the color of the eyes perfectly. Slightly overexposing the face and asking the subject to lean toward the camera, as I did here, can produce a more dramatic image.

Increasing the contrast
I increased the contrast in this image by adjusting the levels in Photoshop. This mimics the conventional film technique of overexposing and then overdeveloping in processing, or processing transparency film as a negative.

Black and white in Photoshop
Again using Photoshop, I adjusted the image with the channel mixer to control the grade of printing.

tip

A cheaper alternative to a professional ring flash is a product based around a speedlight. Designed primarily for macro photography, it can have some use in portraiture.

▲ Ring flash and glamor
The ring flash is a good effect for fun and even glamor portraits. With the subject almost in profile, the camera and ring flash were pointed directly at the subject and wall. The light shadow that surrounds the subject is a characteristic of ring flash when the subject is positioned slightly away from the background.

◄ Minimal shadow on background
Even against a white wall ring flash gives an almost shadowless effect, allowing you to concentrate on the subject.

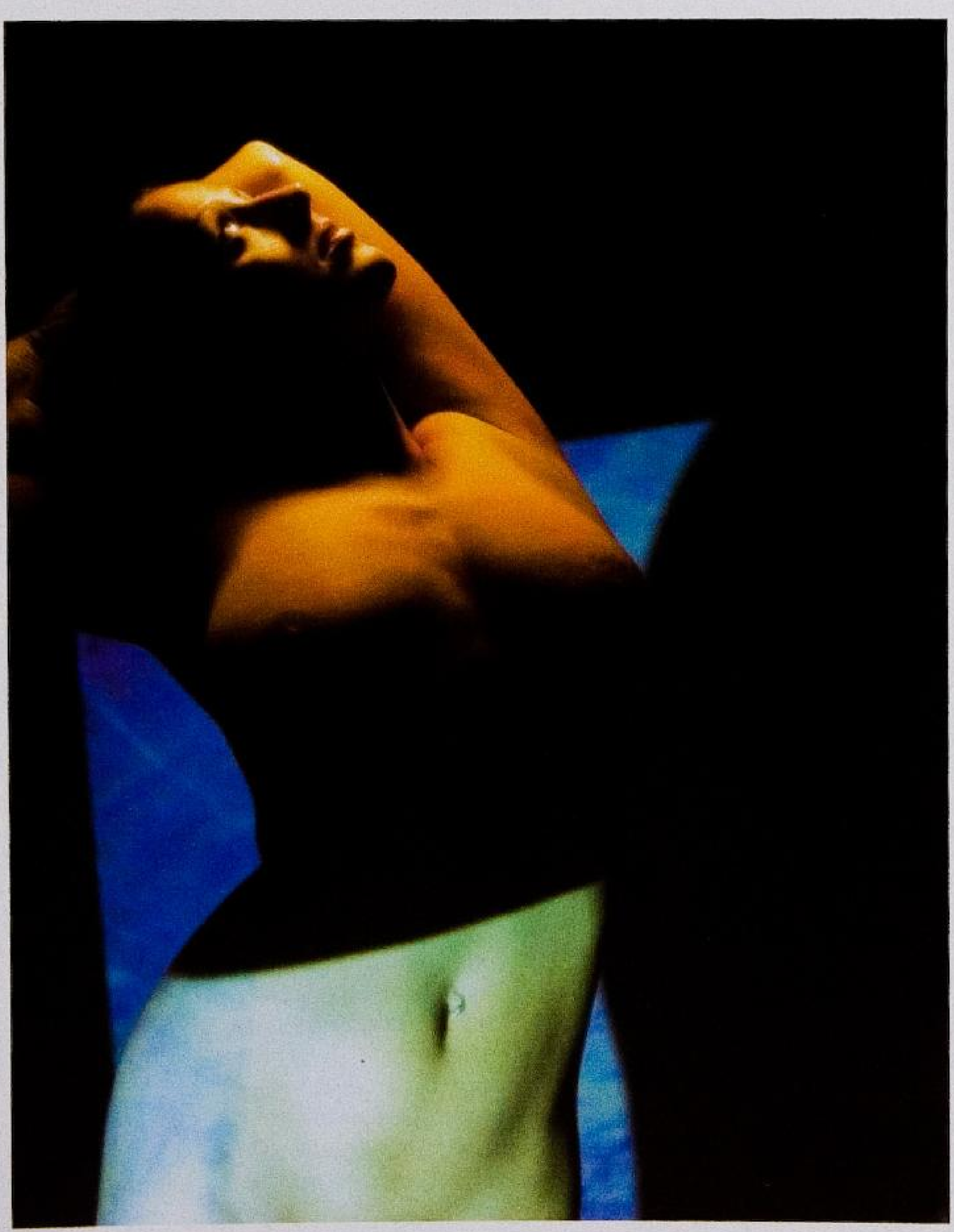
Projecting Images

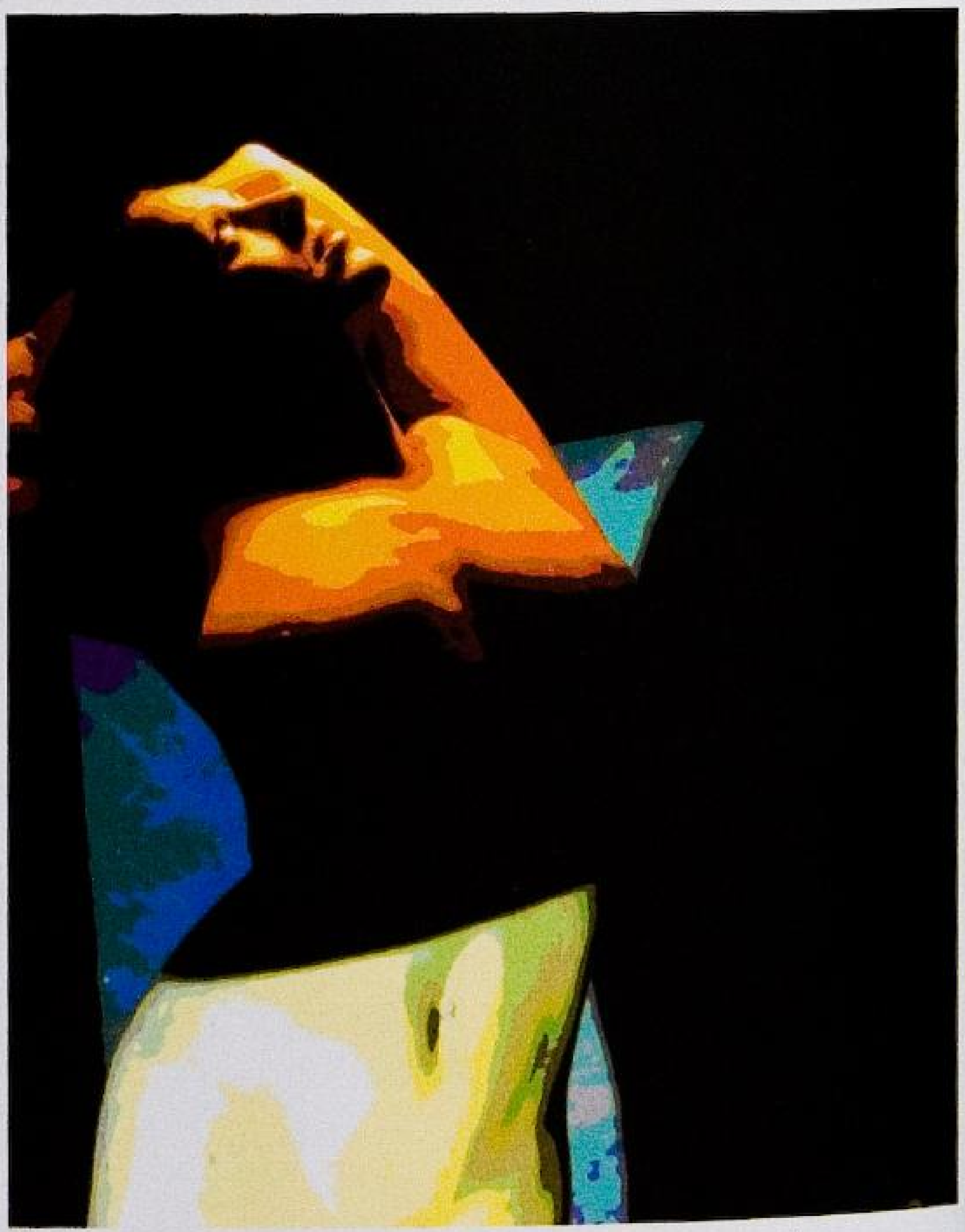
One lighting technique that I like to use is to project another image onto a nude. This allows you to introduce unusual, and sometimes surreal-looking, textures and juxtapostions of themes.

First, photograph objects or landscapes that would be suitable for projection. You need to think of a subject that will enhance the nude and not detract from it by being too recognizable. Materials such as wood grain or pebbles on a beach, or landscape details such as crashing waves or moody skies and clouds, or out-of-focus objects, are all suitable. Then, using a laptop computer connected to a digital projector, or an ordinary slide projector, illuminate the subject by projecting the image onto it. The projected image will appear to flow over and around the body, producing abstract shapes and interesting juxtapositions of ideas.

As a variation, try mixing the projection technique with a secondary light source. The projector is a very low-powered light source, so I use the modeling bulb on my studio lights instead of flash to balance out the quantity of light. The two light sources have different color temperatures, but you can choose which light source to balance for either at the time you take the photograph or later on, using an image-manipulation program such as Adobe Photoshop.

Torso lit by digital projector
I photographed some dyed fabric with the light behind it to exaggerate the colors and show off the textures. I asked the model to stand slightly away from the white wall so that the projected image of the fabric would continue into the background.





Torso lit by digital projector, with tungsten light on the face
I projected an image onto the lower body and lit the upper torso with a variable modeling light, fitted with a narrow reflector attachment to shape the fall-off to shadow.

Posterized version
Here I have taken the image one step further by manipulating it in Adobe Photoshop using the posterization technique. This gives very solid patches of color—a similar effect to screen-printing.

Using One Light Creatively

If you're relatively new to the whole idea of photographic lighting, start by using just one light creatively, as in these photographs. This is a good way of getting used to the idea of moving lights around and experimenting with their position and intensity.

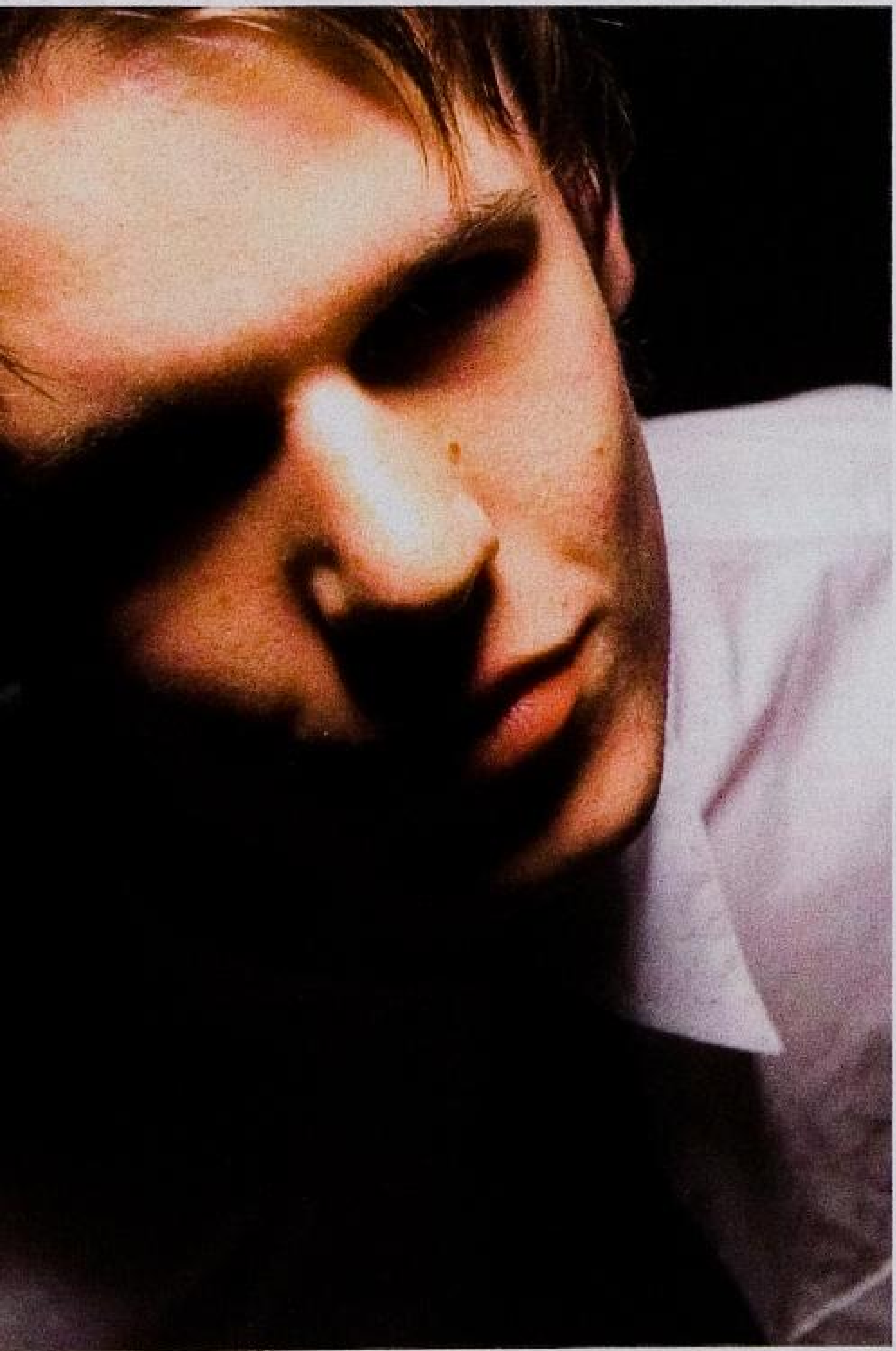
In the images on these two pages, one flash head was positioned above the subject, mimicking a room light or downlighter. A reflector dish was fitted to the flash head to control the pool of light and maintain its brightness and sharpness.

One of the main problems with using a single, directional light source is that it creates deep shadow. If the lighting is from above, as here, the top of the head is illuminated while the eye sockets (which are recessed) are not. A catchlight in the eye is normally desirable in portraits to convey a sense of personality and life. When the area around the eyes is dark, the model takes on a black-eyed "panda" look. You can get around this by asking the model to tilt his or her head up toward the light so that the eyes are illuminated.

However, you can also use this kind of lighting for creative reasons. The simplest way to create mood in a portrait is to create a point of highlight in darkness. This is used every day in theater and film; the technique is very simple and a perfect way of using just one light creatively.

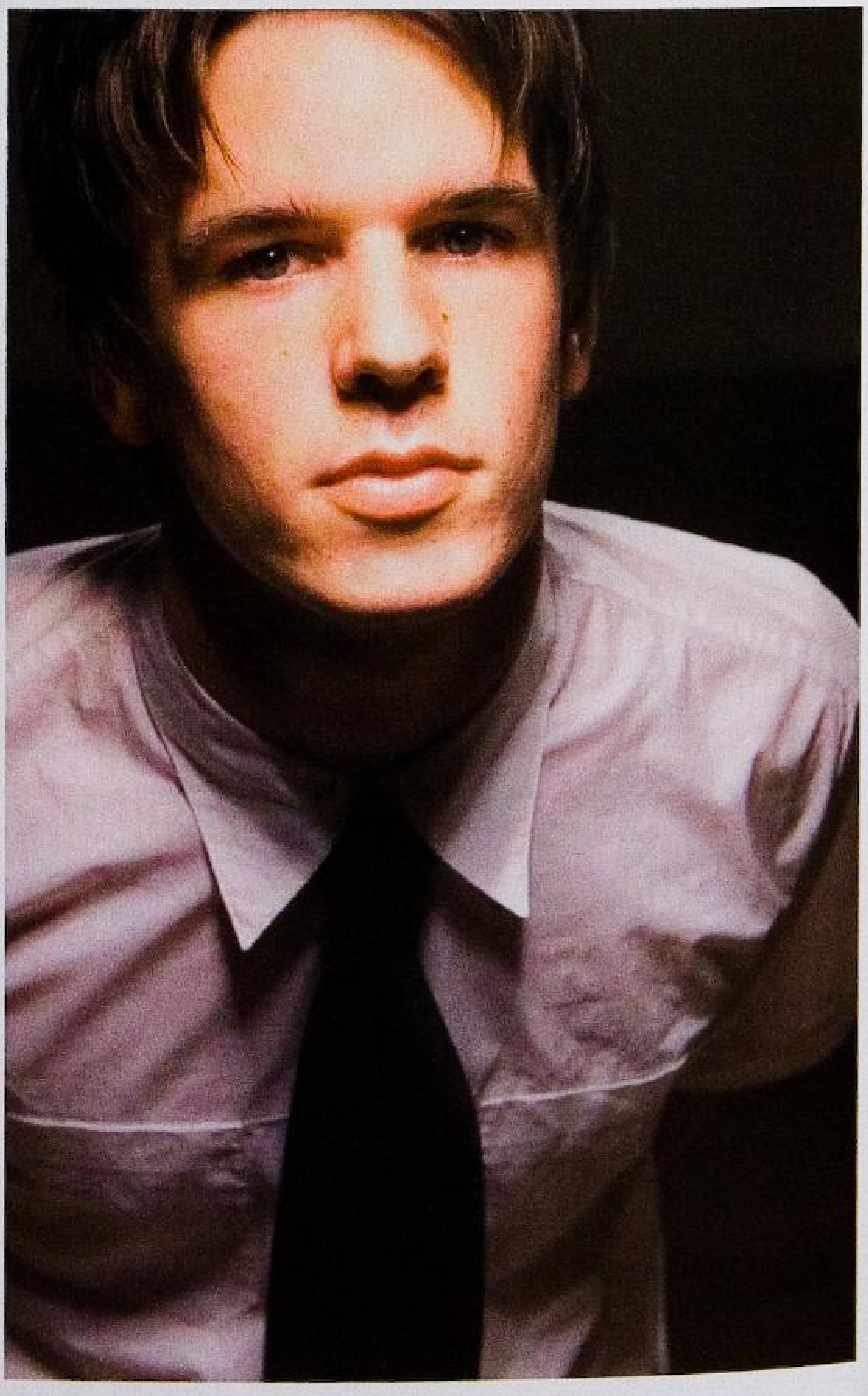
tips

- To overcome the "panda" look, lower the flash head slightly.
- Alternatively, choose a high viewpoint and ask your subject to raise his or her head toward the camera.

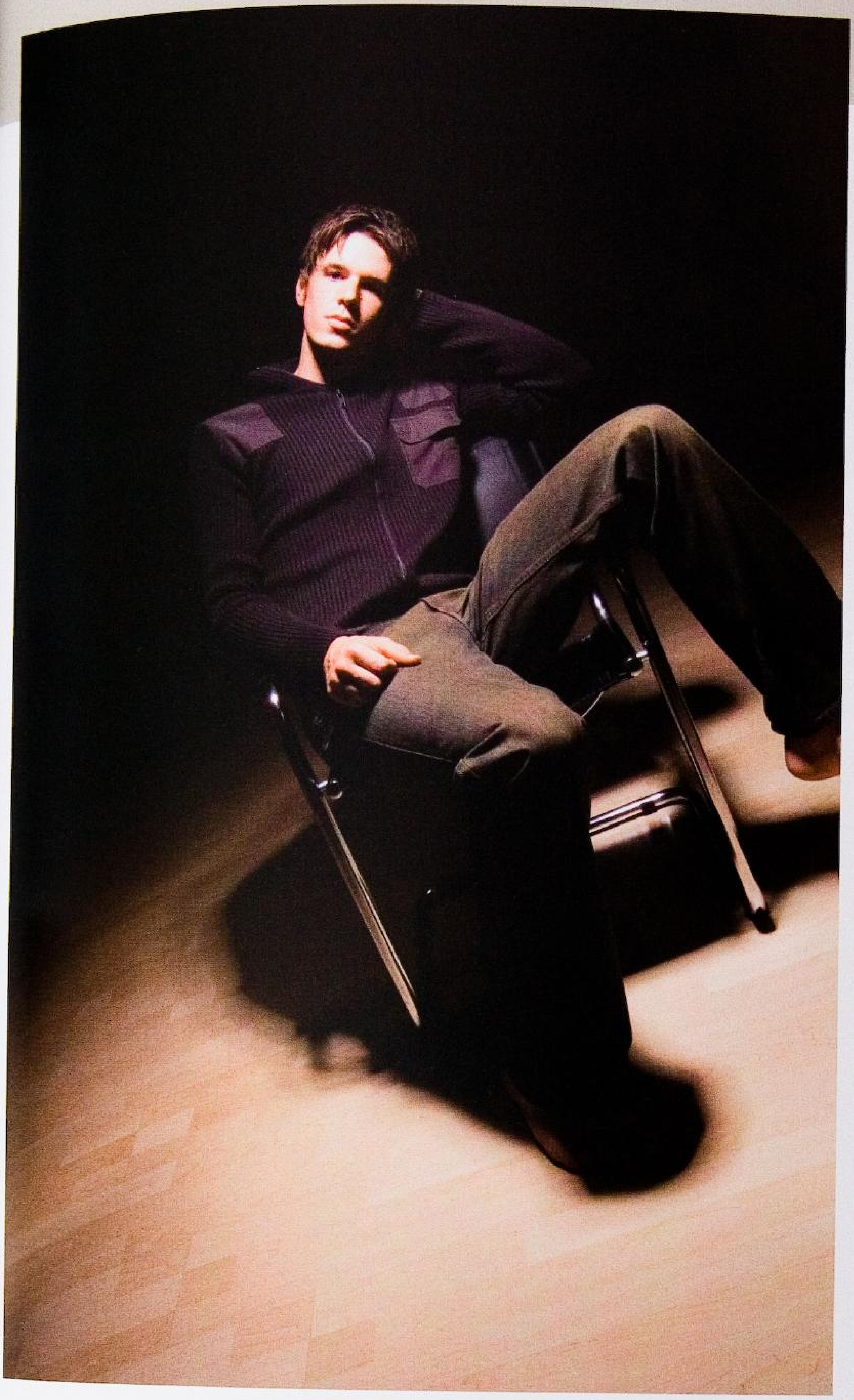


▲ The "panda" look
Because the light is positioned overhead, the forehead is well illuminated—but the recessed eye sockets are in shadow and look completely black.

▲ Detail in the eyes
When the model slightly raises his chin, more light falls on his face. This decreases the "panda" effect, but the overall somber mood created by using just one strongly directional light remains.



▶ Light softened
Moving the flash slightly in front of the subject feathers and softens the hard light source.

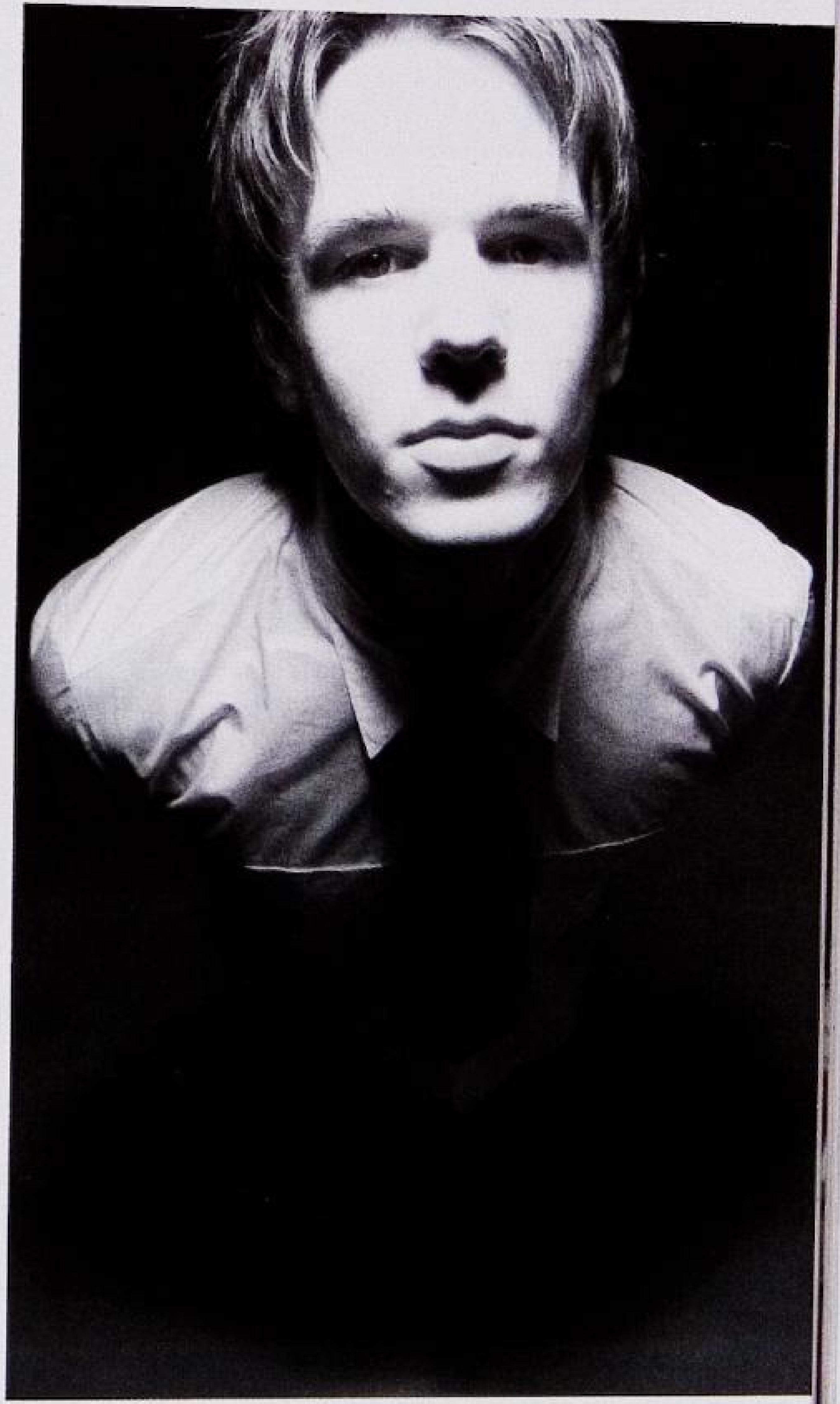


now try this...

In a darkened room, position your model beneath an overhead light source. Switch on the light and get your subject to move forward and backward, in and out of the pool of light. Note how both the intensity of the light and the mood of the shot change dramatically when the model is near or directly under the light source. Note, too, how soft and subtle the light is just before the subject moves into darkness; this is the feather edge of the light.

Now do the same test next to:

- A table lamp
- A window in sunlight
- A window in shade



▲ **Using a wide-angle lens**
Using a wide-angle lens gives an exaggerated viewpoint. The mood is controlled by putting the hot spot on the forehead, a great technique with black and white.

▲ **Controlling shadow**
In this shot, I controlled the amount of shadow on the face by asking the model to tilt his head up toward the light.

▶ **The set-up**
A flash head fitted with a reflector dish is positioned above the subject to mimic a room light.

Soft Light

By fitting the key light with a soft-light reflector dish—better known as a parabolic reflector—you can use just one light to create a soft, uniform light that is ideal for portraits.

With a parabolic reflector attachment, light is reflected into the metallic surface of the dish by means of a silver diffusing cone in the center, which covers the flash tube and modeling bulb. The light is both soft (because of the diffusion cone) and broad (because of the size of the parabola). This means that it illuminates a wide area and can be used for both full-length and head-and-shoulders portraits.

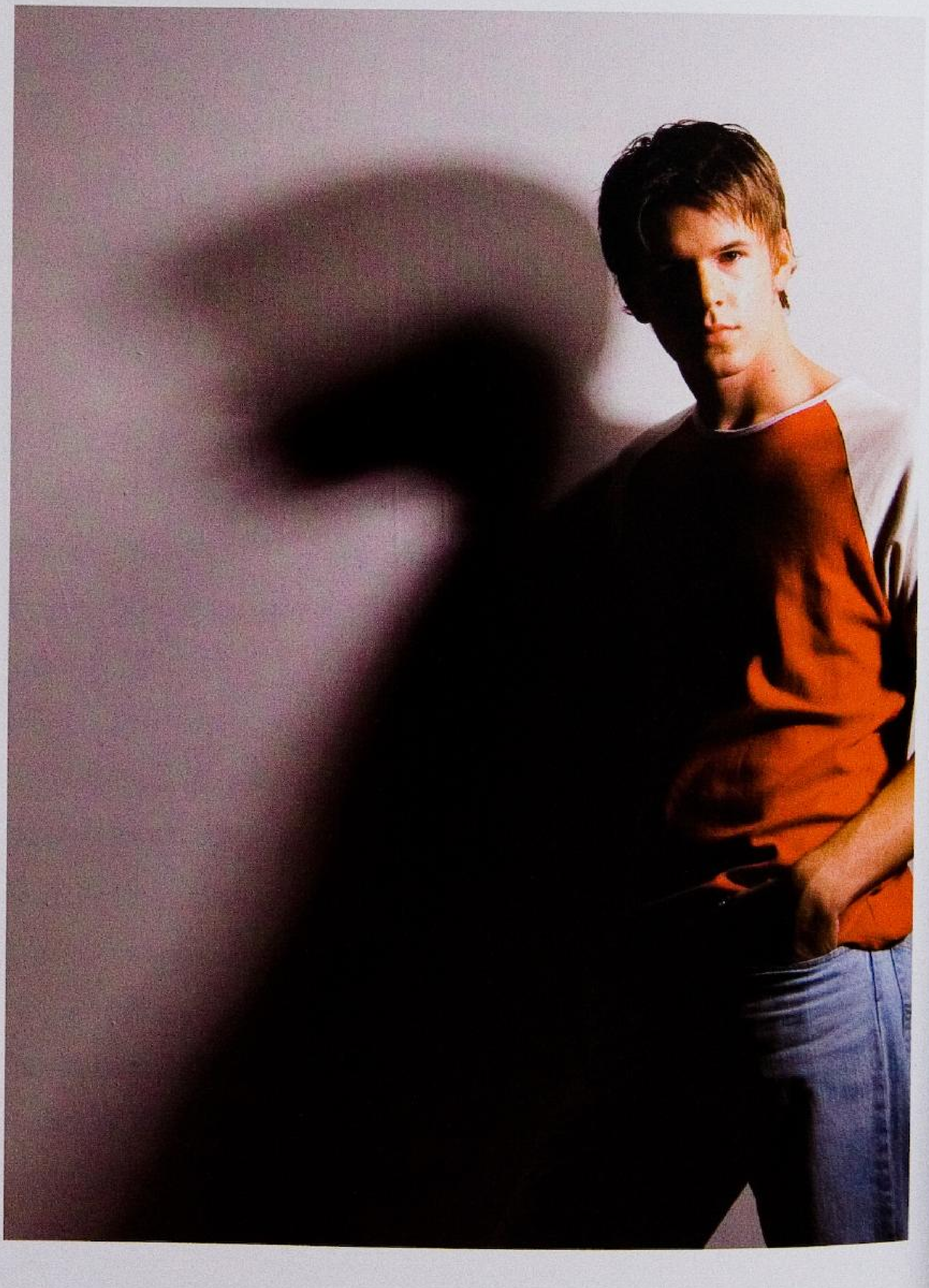
As you can see by looking at the edges of these portraits, which were taken against a white wall, there is a very distinct but soft diffusion of the light going into shadow. The closer the key light is positioned to the subject, the bigger the shadow.

When the subject is positioned further away from the white wall, the natural fall-off of the light has the effect of separating him from the background.

The direction in which the key light is pointing is important, as a different result is instantly obtained depending on

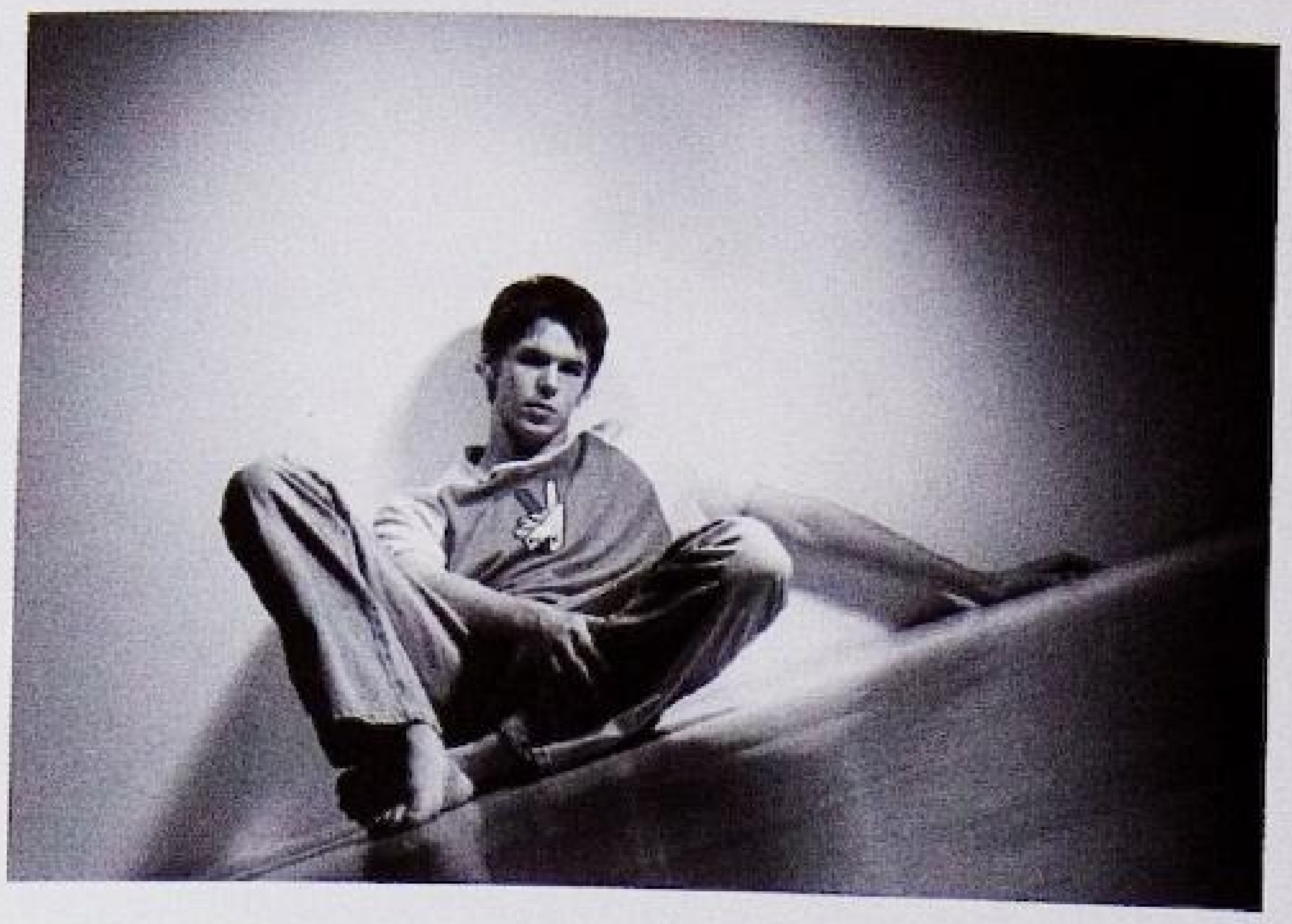
Parabolic reflector
The parabolic, or soft-light, reflector gets its unique quality from a combination of the brushed metallic surface of the dish and the silver diffusing cone in the center.

Characteristic shape of fall-off
The fall-off from the soft light creates an arc shape on the background.

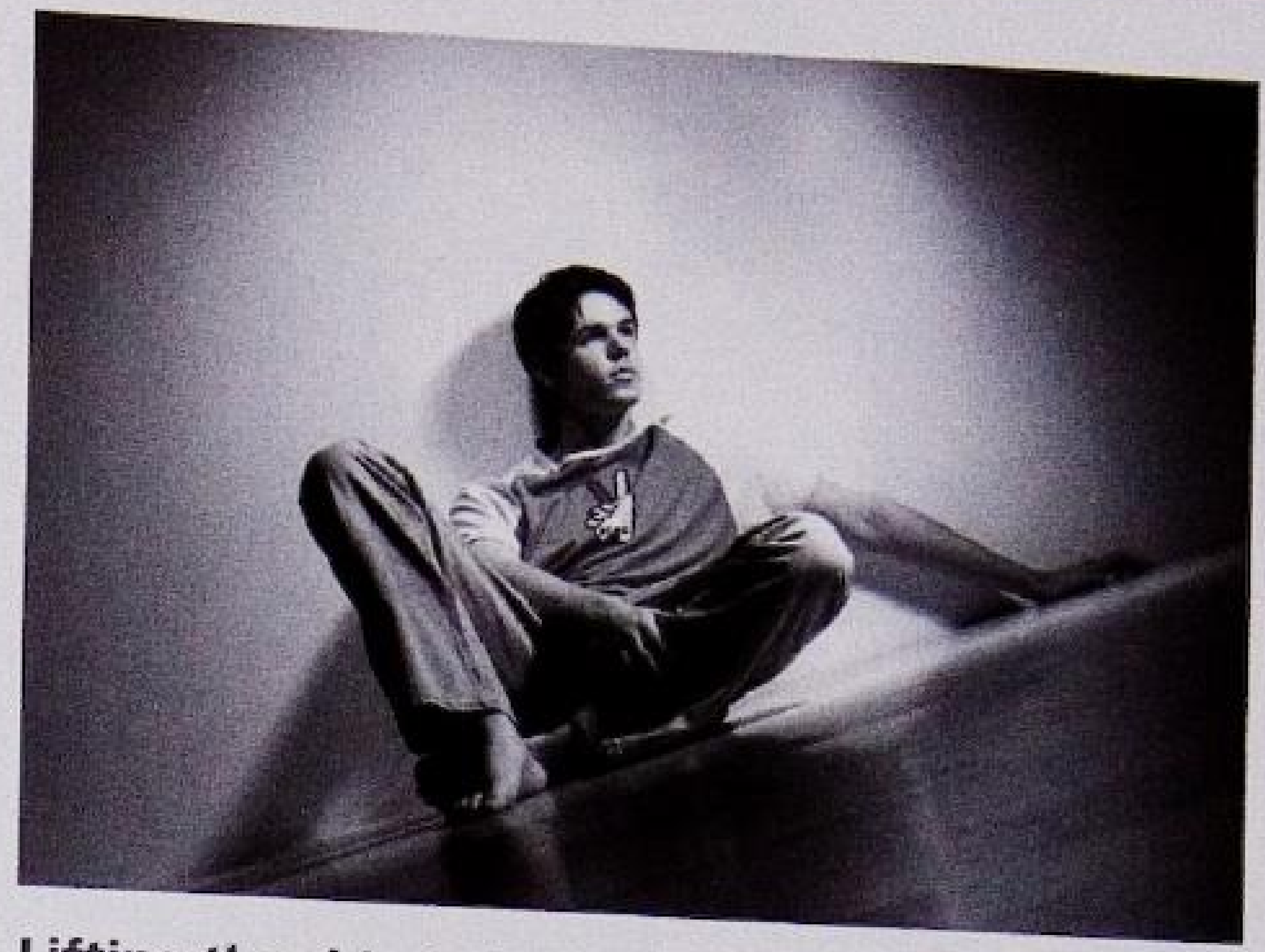


Adding a second light
Here, a second parabolic reflector fitted with a honeycomb acts as an accent to the subject's highlighted face.

whether it is turned toward the camera or the background. When the light is turned toward the camera, the background naturally becomes darker because less light is falling on it. When the light is turned toward the background, however, the subject is lit by the feather edge of the light, while the background becomes lighter.



Panda eyes
Here, the key light (fitted with a parabolic reflector) is positioned above the subject. Because he is looking down, his eye sockets are in shadow and his eyes look like black holes—the "panda" effect.



Lifting the chin to brighten the eyes
When you are using only one light source, soft or otherwise, there will always be some shadow in the portrait. Remember to beware of the "panda" effect in the eyes. The solution is to ask your subject to look toward the light source—often an effective way of creating a moody portrait.

Detail is visible in the eyes.

Believable image
For these three portraits shot against a black background, I used the same soft lighting technique. Even though the light remains static, the subject's position in relation to the light creates slightly different lighting effects on the face. In the first image, the subject is looking up to reduce the shadowing in the eyes; in the second, he is positioned slightly behind the light source to lift some of the detail in the eyes; and in the third image, he is completely under the light source for an overall top illumination. When the three shots are blended together in Photoshop, the image looks believable. Applying gaussian blur to both the front and rear images creates a feeling of depth and adds to the drama.

Looking up reduces shadowing in the eyes.

Illumination from above

Pushing the Boundaries

Try to be as creative with the lighting as possible during a portrait session—otherwise you run the risk of becoming stale and producing predictable images that, in the end, satisfy neither you nor your clients.

Once you've mastered the basic techniques and feel confident about using them, it is no more difficult or expensive to be creative with light. You'll be providing your clients with images that capture their mood and personality, and are unique to them.

The images shown on the following four pages were all taken during the course of a two-hour session shooting photos for an actress and dancer's portfolio. She wanted a range of photos that would not only show off her physical attributes, but would also demonstrate that she could work to the camera and convey a range of moods—pensive, sultry, haughty, lively, and so on.

Creative lighting is essential when you are shooting a portfolio of images for actors, singers, or models. Their photographs must have immediate impact, so that the agency or casting director does not simply put them to the bottom of the pile.

The secret is to always go beyond what you set out to do at the start of the shoot—but always make sure that you first shoot what the client wants before you go off on a creative tangent. A good starting point is to ask the client to bring in a selection of photos cut from magazines that he or she likes and dislikes; this instantly tells you how creative or conservative they are likely to be.

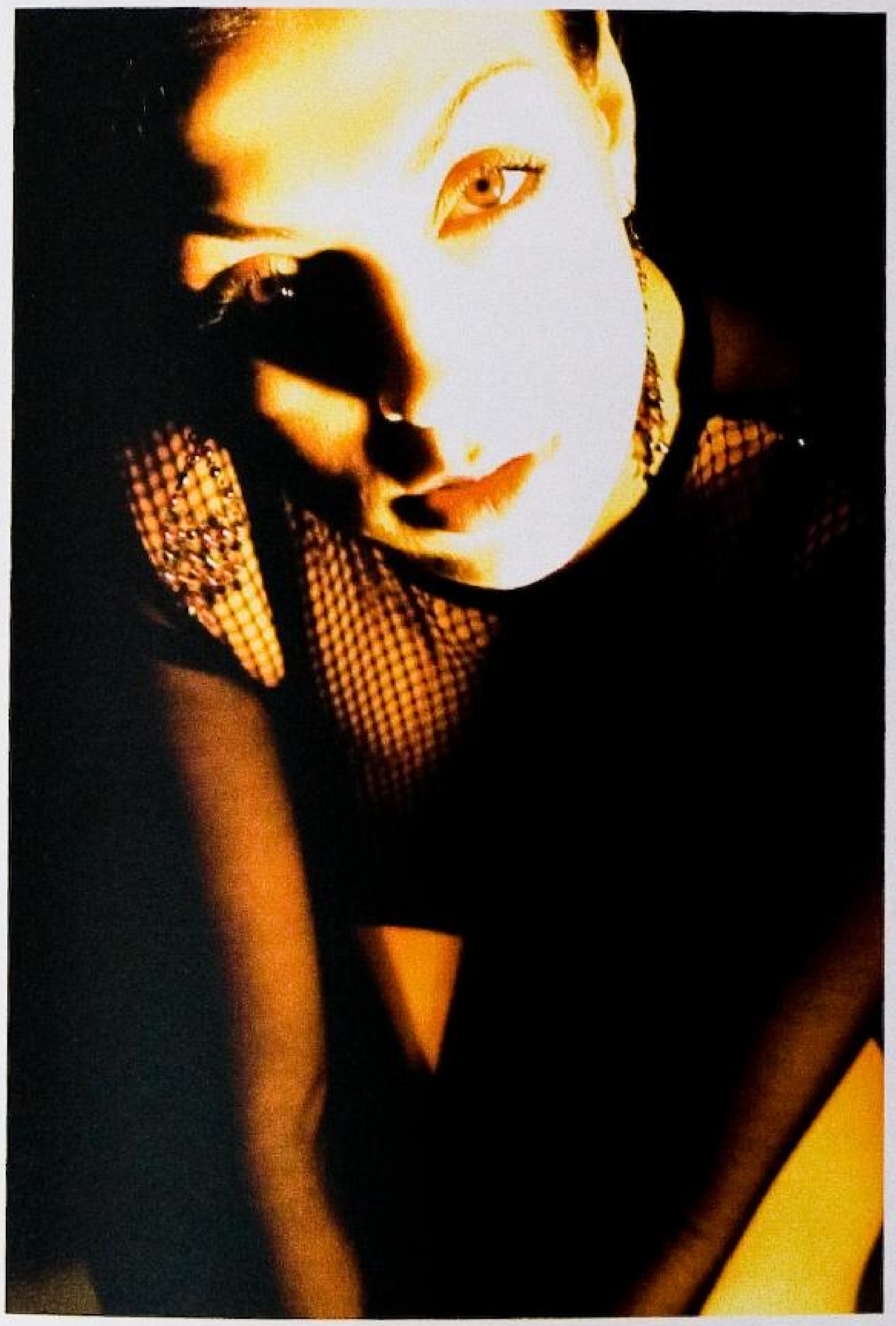
The range of clothing that your client brings will determine the style of the

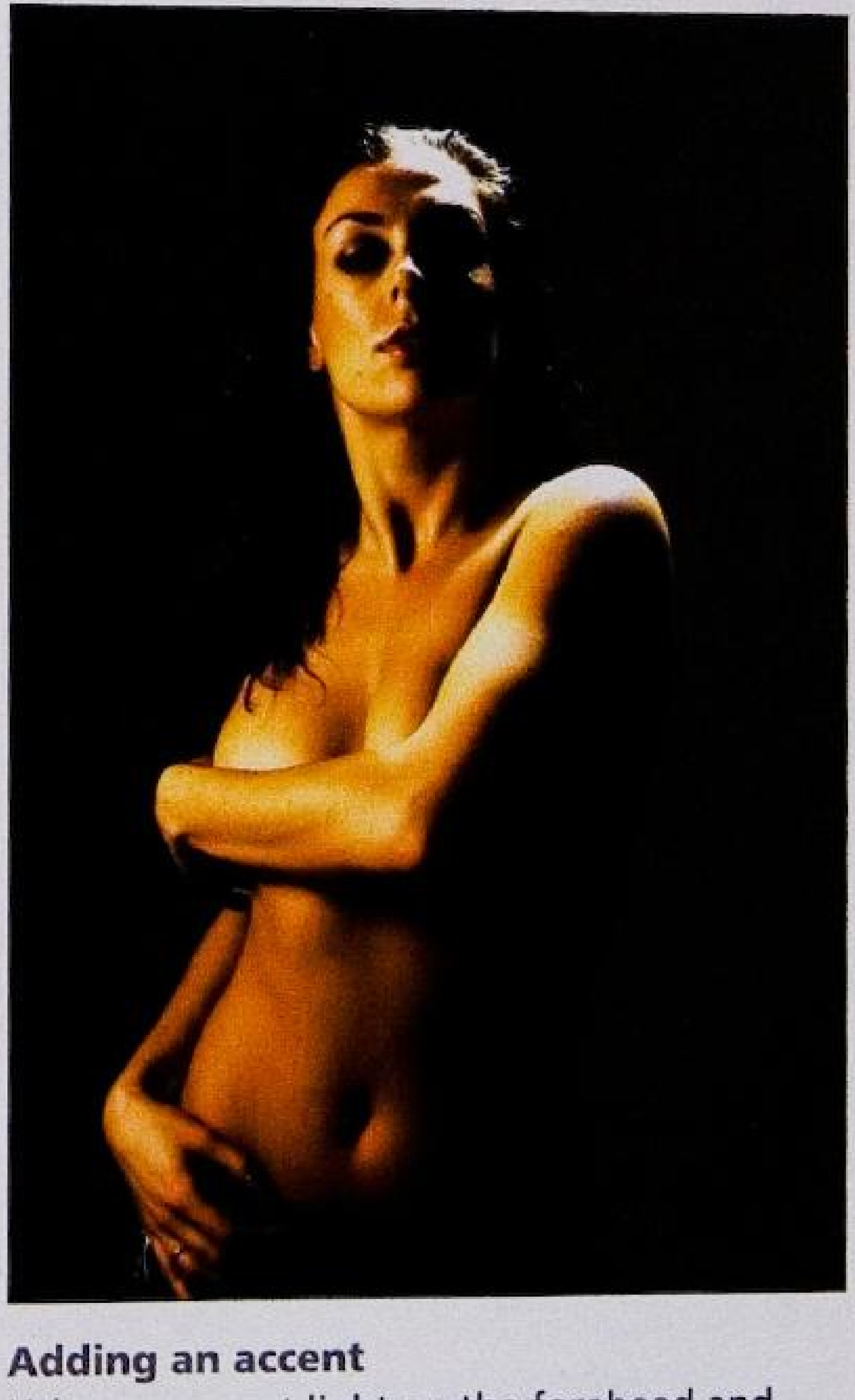
Shaping the light
Dramatic portraits are often achieved with the simplest of lighting techniques. Here, I lit the subject with an out-of-focus spotlight attachment. The natural vignette caused by the fall-off of light around the subject gives a controlled shape to the light from the unfocused beam.

Keep it simple
This simple image was created using two lights—one to light the subject from the side and another to drop a pool of light on the floor behind her to give separation. The key light was fitted with a reflector dish and barn doors and positioned at 90° to the subject, to light mainly one side of the face. Finally, I added a blue tone for mood, using the color balance controls in Photoshop.

Classic pose
This shot, with its classic pose and directional lighting, is reminiscent of early black-and-white Hollywood portraits with touches of light bringing to life sections of the background. The key light, fitted with a reflector dish and barn doors, was positioned high above the subject to illuminate the body, emphasize the face, and create a shadow on the floor. The background was lit from both sides, with one light from above and one from below to create a diagonal highlight from corner to corner.

Adding movement to the portrait
The key light in this portrait was positioned low down to add drama and fitted with a reflector dish to control the spread of light. No flash was used—only the tungsten modeling bulb, which brings a warm feeling to the portrait; it also allowed me to position the light source very close to the subject and still use a wide aperture to throw as much of the image as possible out of focus. I used a slow shutter speed to capture some movement. The in-camera overexposure was then exaggerated by slightly increasing the level as well as the saturation and color in Photoshop.

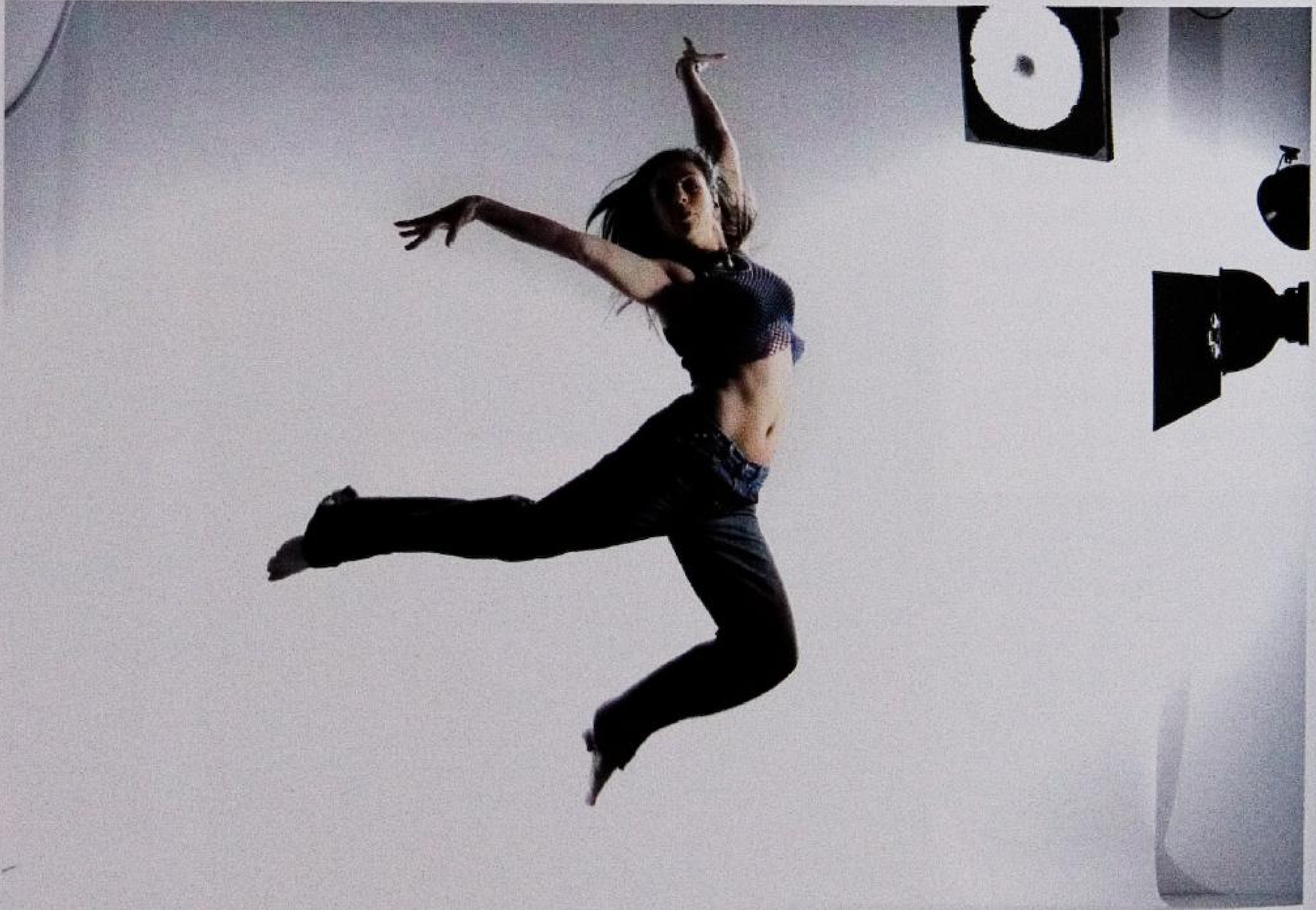




Adding an accent
Using an accent light on the forehead and shoulder allowed me to draw attention to the head and shoulders rather than to the naked torso. The image was lit overall by a parabolic reflector, which illuminates both body and white wall. The drama of the image was created in Photoshop by dramatically increasing the contrast and color.

◄ Soft lighting and in-camera overexposure
The key light was fitted with a reflector dish covered with one layer of diffusion material to slightly soften the contrast. This light was positioned below the subject, pointing upward. A second light fitted with a parabolic reflector was positioned above and slightly in front of the subject—as you can see from the catchlight in the eye. Finally, I increased the contrast a little in Photoshop and added an overall warm tone using the color balance controls.

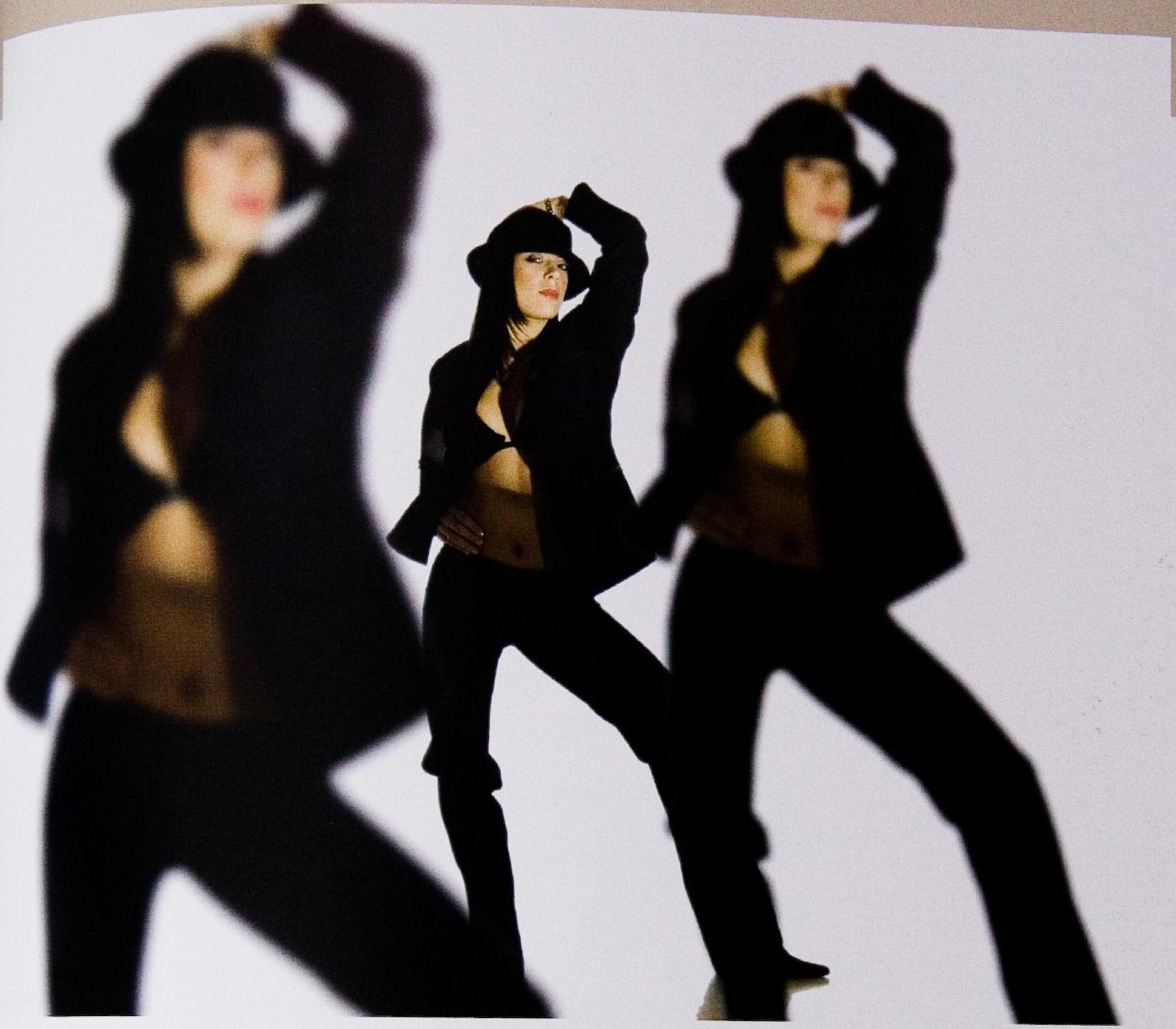
▲ One light and contrast
To illuminate the face with a contrasty pool of light, I positioned a key light, fitted with a reflector dish with a polished chrome interior, close to the model. I over-exposed the image by one stop, creating a natural contrast and a slight bleaching-out of the skin; I then increased the color saturation and contrast in Photoshop, giving further impact to the portrait.



portrait: a classic outfit will usually lead to a classic, simple style of portrait that concentrates on expression and pose. Funky clothing will always demand a more creative image.

Finally, don't overlook the importance of digital manipulation. When you're proficient at it, you will probably find yourself taking shots with the specific intention of manipulating them in the post-production stage to create particular effects; and, of course, used sensitively, this can be an invaluable way of enhancing your subject by, perhaps removing a few wrinkles.

▲ Freezing flight
My task was to exaggerate the dancer's pose. I lit her from the side with a key light fitted with a reflector dish, to which I added a single barn door; this stopped any flare, but allowed light to spill onto the background. I accent lit the body with a parabolic reflector for its softness, but fitted the light with a honeycomb so that I could control where the accent would hit. In Photoshop, I desaturated all color apart from the subject.



▲ Multiplicity
The combination of black clothing and white background led me to light the background for high key (see page 70); I then lit the face and torso with a projection spot to create a harsh, stage-like lighting so as not to draw too much attention to the lower half of the body. In Photoshop, I selected the subject using the magic wand tool; I then inverted the selection, copying and pasting the selection onto a larger canvas size. Two of the new layers were free-transformed to make them slightly bigger and then a gaussian blur was applied to hide the pixel transformation and create some perspective through the use of selective focus.

◀ Lighting from below for effect
This image was also taken with one light fitted with a reflector dish. The light was positioned almost directly below the camera, pointing up toward the subject, causing the nose shadow to go up instead of down and creating a horror-movie style of lighting. I also positioned a large fan near the key light to blow the subject's hair away from her face and draw attention to her eyes.

5 On Location

In this chapter we look at how to mimic studio lighting techniques in everyday surroundings, using both natural and artificial light, and at how to exploit locations to maximum effect.

Using Window Light

Many studio flash lighting techniques can be mimicked very easily using natural light coming through a window.

Large diffused light source
Because the light coming through the large window was diffused by the frosting of the glass, the subject was able to stand close to the window with any risk of the detail on her white dress burning out. Light reflects off the white wall behind her, which is lit by the brighter window in the background, and illuminates the shadow area on the back of the dress.

When I work on location, whether it's in a client's home or an office, I try to use natural window light; not only does window light give a different mood than studio flash, but that mood also changes at different times of day as it combines with the ambient light in the room. The lighting effect from a window can range from a soft, romantic warm glow in early evening to a harsh, theatrical effect in the middle of the day when the window is in strong sunlight. The quantity and the quality of the light coming through the window also depends on the size and shape of the window.

I usually use the largest window in the home, because if there is enough light to light a full-length portrait then there will also be enough light to shoot small groups and head-and-shoulders shots.

If the room is going to be a part of the setting, make sure that you can place your subject not only near the window but also further into the room. This gives you flexibility: since the light falls off the further away from the window you get, being able to move your subject will allow you some control over the intensity of the light.

Backlit subjects

One of the problems of backlighting is that the main subject can appear underexposed. This series shows how simple it is to balance the exposure by using fill-in flash.

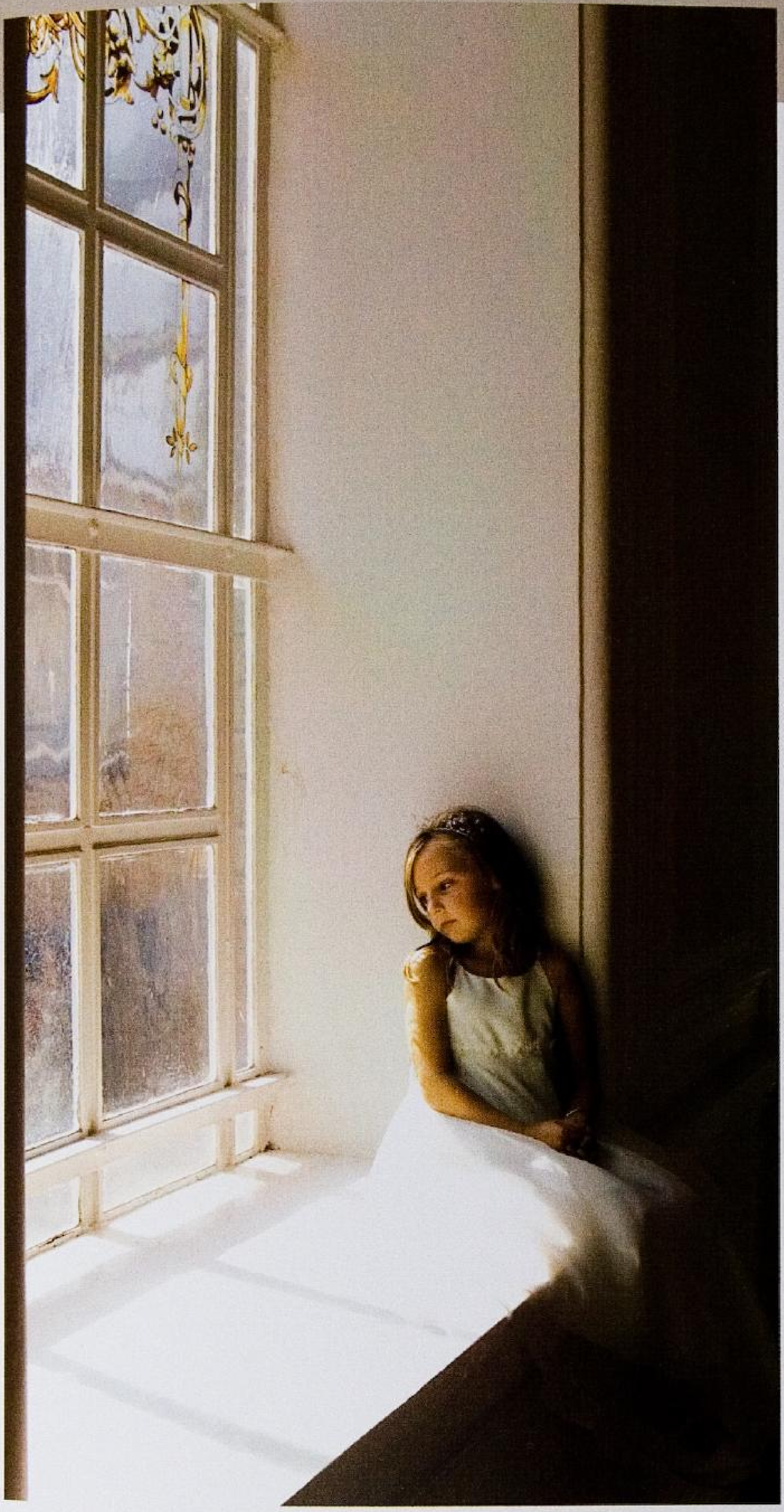
Light from behind
Because most of the light is coming from behind, the light on the face is soft and lacking in contrast. This is similar to a high-key studio set-up in which the background is lit too brightly.

Adding light
To balance the exposure on the skin tone a little better, I used a speedlight on the camera, set to automatic.

You can soften and diffuse window light by covering the window with a translucent material such as voile. This gives a quality of light similar to that produced by a soft box; the only disadvantage is that you cannot control the angle of the sunlight, as this depends on the time of day.

When the sun is strong and streaming through a window, the effect is similar to spot lighting in terms of both shape, which is controlled by the shape of the window, and intensity and contrast. On a very sunny day, place a diffusion reflector panel in the window in order to reduce the intensity.

If your subject is backlit, you have to choose whether to meter for the subject and risk overexposing the background, or to meter for the background, which could easily lead to the subject being underexposed. If you decide to meter for the subject, take a meter



Speckled light
On a sunny day the light falling on the subject can be very speckled and uneven, as in this portrait. I positioned the young girl mainly in the shade, but allowed the speckled light to touch her nose and arm to add a magical quality of light to the image.

Adding modeling

Diffused window light can sometimes create a flat-lit image. As the light source cannot be moved, the only way to create more modeling is to move the subject.

Flat lighting
The window position and the direction of the subject's gaze have combined to produce a flat-lit image.

Turning the head to create modeling
When the subject turns her face toward the camera, some shadow is created on the side furthest from the window. This instantly creates modeling on the face.

reading very close to the subject, as this will avoid the backlighting giving a false reading. If you use a reflector, take the reading with the reflector panel in place—otherwise the extra light that you gain from introducing the reflector will result in the subject being overexposed.

Large window, small subject
The window that you choose to use will not always have the best quality of light; this window was chosen for its grandeur and the dramatic contrast in scale between it and the little girl.

tips

- When the sun is high in the sky, the light coming through a window is at a more acute angle —so the subject will need to be lower than the window, seated on a chair or on the floor, in order to be in the brightest part of the light. The subject will also need to tilt his or her head up toward the light to illuminate the face and avoid any harsh shadow in the eyes.
- Position a white reflector panel underneath the camera and pointing toward the subject to reflect the light, tilting it back toward the window to control shadow detail.

Using Window Light at 45°

Shooting great portraits with no extra equipment other than a piece of white card sounds like a joke—but if you can master this technique, you will be the one who is laughing. All you need is window, a reflector, and a camera.

The secret is to position your subject at 45° to the window. When using a fixed light source such as a window, there is obviously a limit to how much you can control the light—but all you need to understand it that, if you can't move the light source, you have to move either the camera or the subject.

When you have chosen your window, position the camera as close to the window wall as possible, shooting along the wall toward a good background, and position the subject at 45° to the window. If the window is small or the sun is high, the subject may need to be seated—otherwise the catchlight in the eye from the window light will not be at the top of the eye.

Place a piece of white card or a fold-away reflector disc in front of the camera and below the subject, at around chest level for a head-and-shoulders portrait or below the knees for a three-quarter-length shot; this will lift the shadow on the side of the face that is furthest away from the window, and eliminate any slight shadowing or darkness under the eyes.

45° window lighting
Because the large window was covered with netting to soften the light, I was able to place the subject approximately 2 feet (60 cm) away from the window, but level with the edge of the window that was furthest away from the camera. The camera was positioned near the window to achieve the 45° lighting pattern, which draws attention to the five planes of the face.

Flat lighting
By getting the subject to look at the camera, which is in front of the window, the lighting is flatter: the broad light source reduces shadow over the whole of the face.

Window and reflector
I placed a white reflector in front of the camera, to gently improve the detail in the shadow areas but not to overilluminate the subject.

Three-quarter face
I moved the camera away from the window to change the direction of the light on the model; now more shadow area is visible.

Two-thirds face
For two-thirds face portraits, either the camera or the subject must be moved to maintain the 45° lighting pattern on the face. It is quicker to move the camera than to move the subject, but doing so also changes the area of background that can be seen in the shot.

Degrading the light
With the subject lying down on the sofa, the light hitting the face is interrupted and degraded. If the light source is strong, the interruption will greatly reduce and soften the light; but when the light is already softened, as in this portrait, there comes a point where the light is almost too soft, and we have to rely on the depth of the shadow to give shape to the face.

tip

- If you position your subject in the middle of the window looking directly at the camera, you will create a split-lighting effect (see page 56). Instead, place your subject slightly beyond the window edge, so that the edge of the light from the window illuminates the five planes of the face.

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Manipulating Window Light

When using a studio flash, it is simple to reposition the key light to give classic and creative lighting results. To use window light creatively, you have to move the subject or the camera—or both.

These two pages demonstrate how to create two simple studio techniques—butterfly lighting and split lighting—using natural window light.

Butterfly lighting

The easiest way to achieve this lighting pattern is to make sure that the subject is lower than the light source (the window) and positioned close to the window and turned into the light.

You will need a reflector panel, or even a piece of white card, to reflect as much of the light as possible back up to relieve any shadows. Remember that this technique will give a flatter—and hence fatter—result, but will disguise many facial flaws because of the lack of shadow.

Split lighting

If you position your subject at 90° to the window and square on to the camera, next to the window, the light will hit just one side of the body and face, causing a shadow effect down the other side—split lighting, in other words. Many photographers do this accidentally when they are first learning to use natural window light — and the reason is that they forget that the window is, in effect, the key light.

Split lighting is best used for "creative" images rather than general portraiture, which usually requires more overall detail. You can exaggerate the split-lighting technique when using window light by closing the drapes, so that a narrow slit of light hits the subject. In a dark room, this will create dramatic, low-key portraits. In a long room, you can create a high-key, split-lit portrait by positioning your subject in the last touch of light from the window edge that is closest to the camera. The wall in front will subtract light, allowing the room to be lit.

Butterfly lighting with window light

Butterfly lighting is a difficult effect to achieve with window light, but it can be done by using silver reflector panels both above and below the subject.

Lighting set-up
The top reflector reflects light down onto the top of the face and the bottom reflector panel; the bottom panel reflects light back to the subject.

Butterfly lighting
Using reflector panel panels enables you to create the butterfly lighting effect.

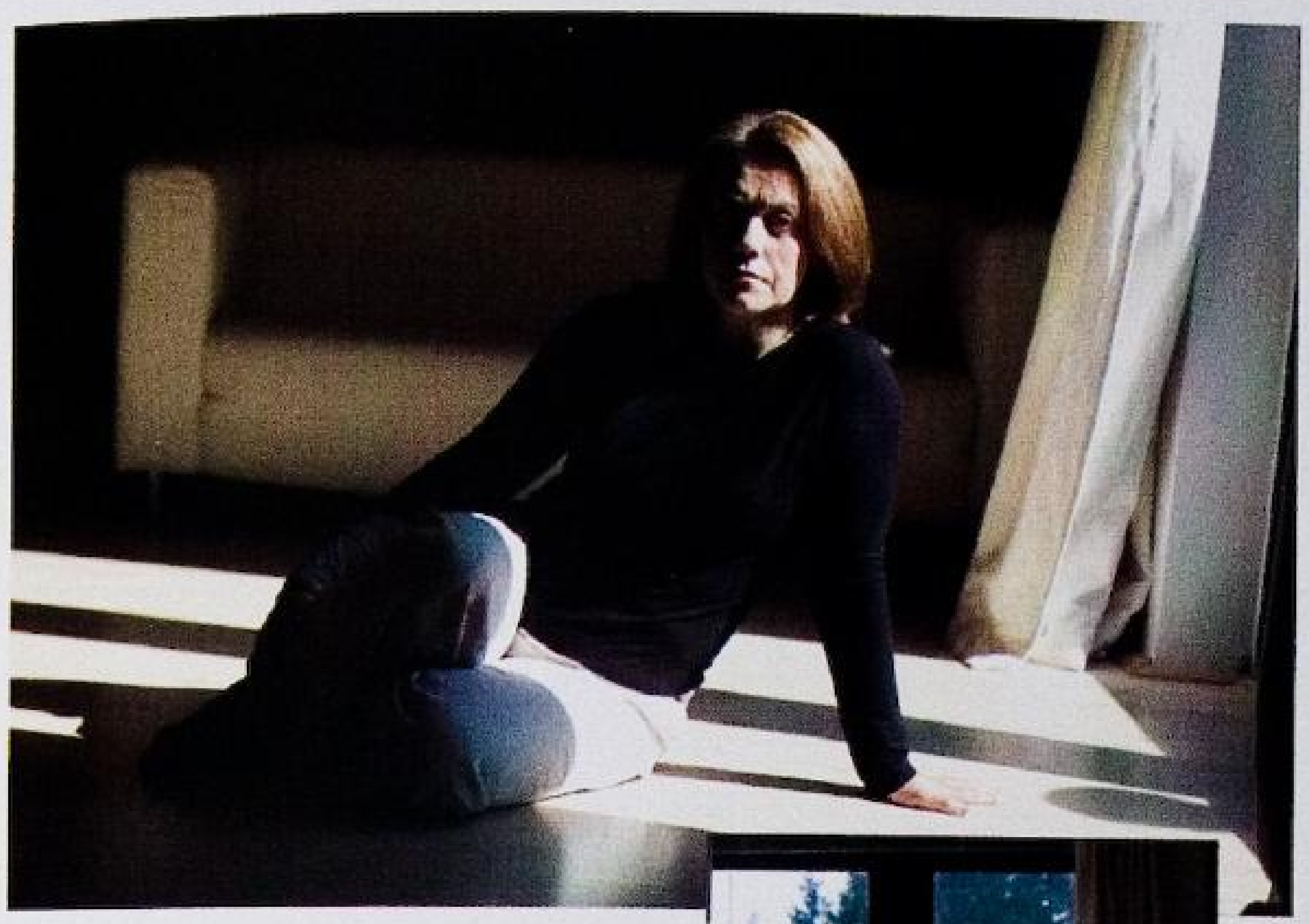
"Horror" lighting
The light reflected from below the subject is more powerful than the light reflected from above; the butterfly lighting effect has been lost.

tips

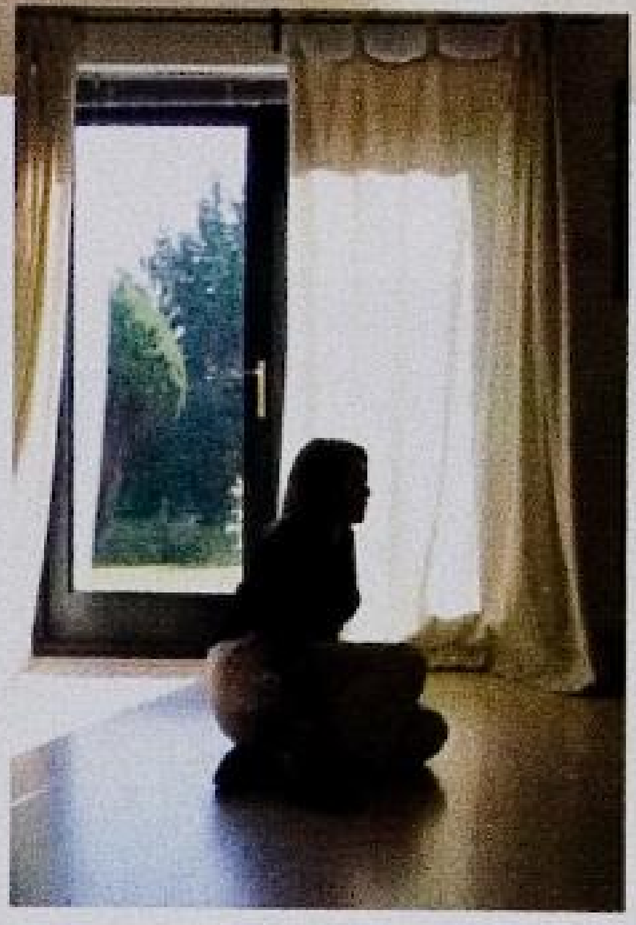
- Remember to look for the large catchlights in the subject's eyes as well as the soft glow and flatness of light associated with beauty lighting.
- If you are using card as a reflector panel, cover it with aluminum foil in order to reflect more light.
- Harsh sunlight can create exciting images, especially when the sunlight is interrupted by an object; you can do this by placing something as simple as a foliage plant between your subject and the window.

Controlling the light

In strong sunlight, you can manipulate the amount of light coming through the window by using drapes and blinds to create different lighting effects.



Hard lighting
Undiffused sunlight causes strong shadows, allowing for simple splitting of the light on the subject. The closer the subject is to the window, the broader the light source; this is why the subject is seated slightly away from the window, to allow for more shadow on the far side of her face and body.



Diffused lighting
When the drape is pulled across half the window, the light falling on the subject is softened, and the background is brighter.

Diffused light on subject and background
When both drapes are closed, the light on both the subject and the setting is diffused.

Interrupting the light
When harsh sunlight is interrupted by an object such as a venetian blind, a spotlit gobo effect occurs, giving crisp patterns on both the subject and the setting.

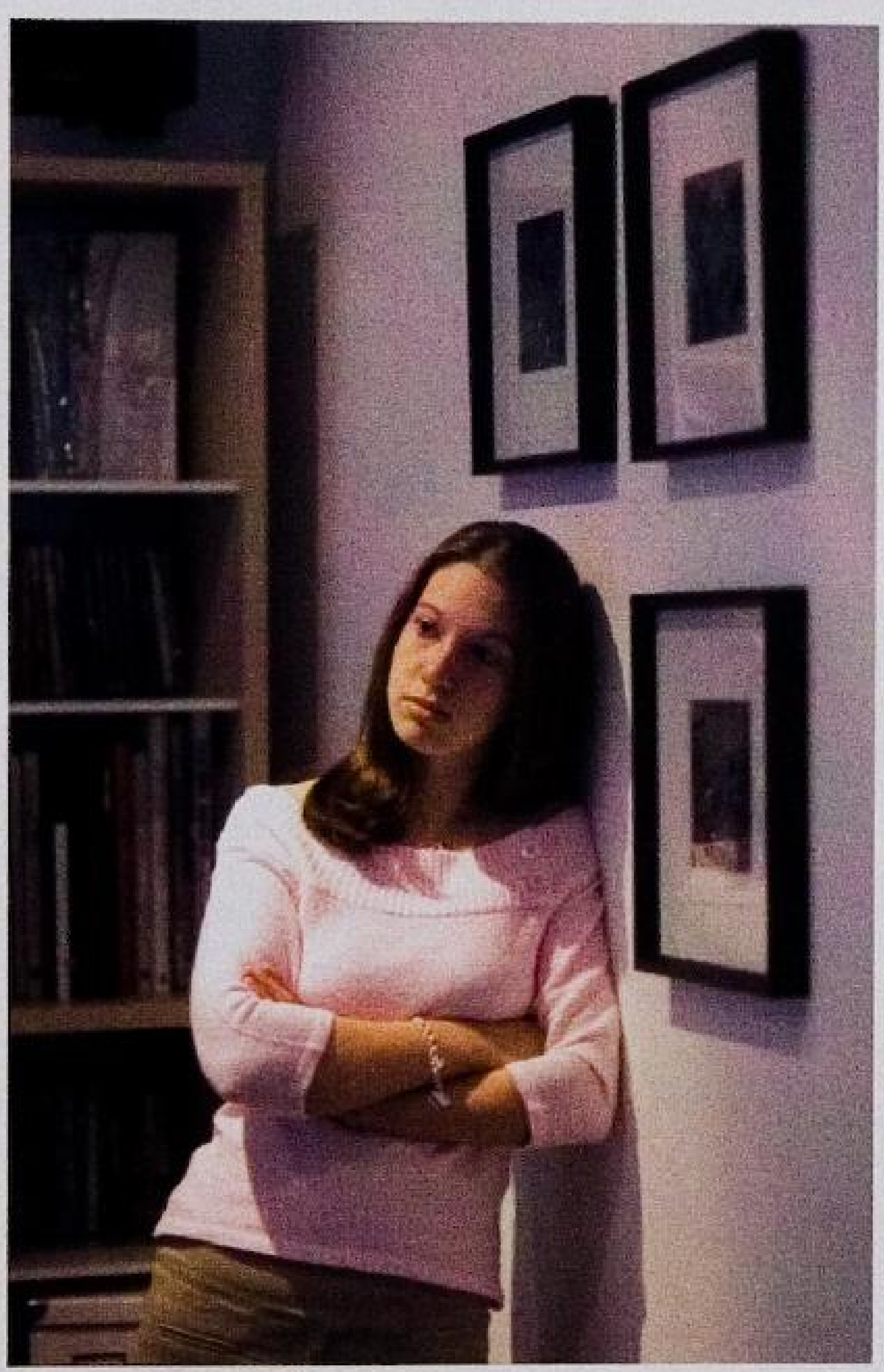
Using Room Lighting

Lights that are found around the home will mimic many of the lighting qualities that we achieve with studio flash accessories, so there is no excuse not to use these artificial light sources for ambience and effect.

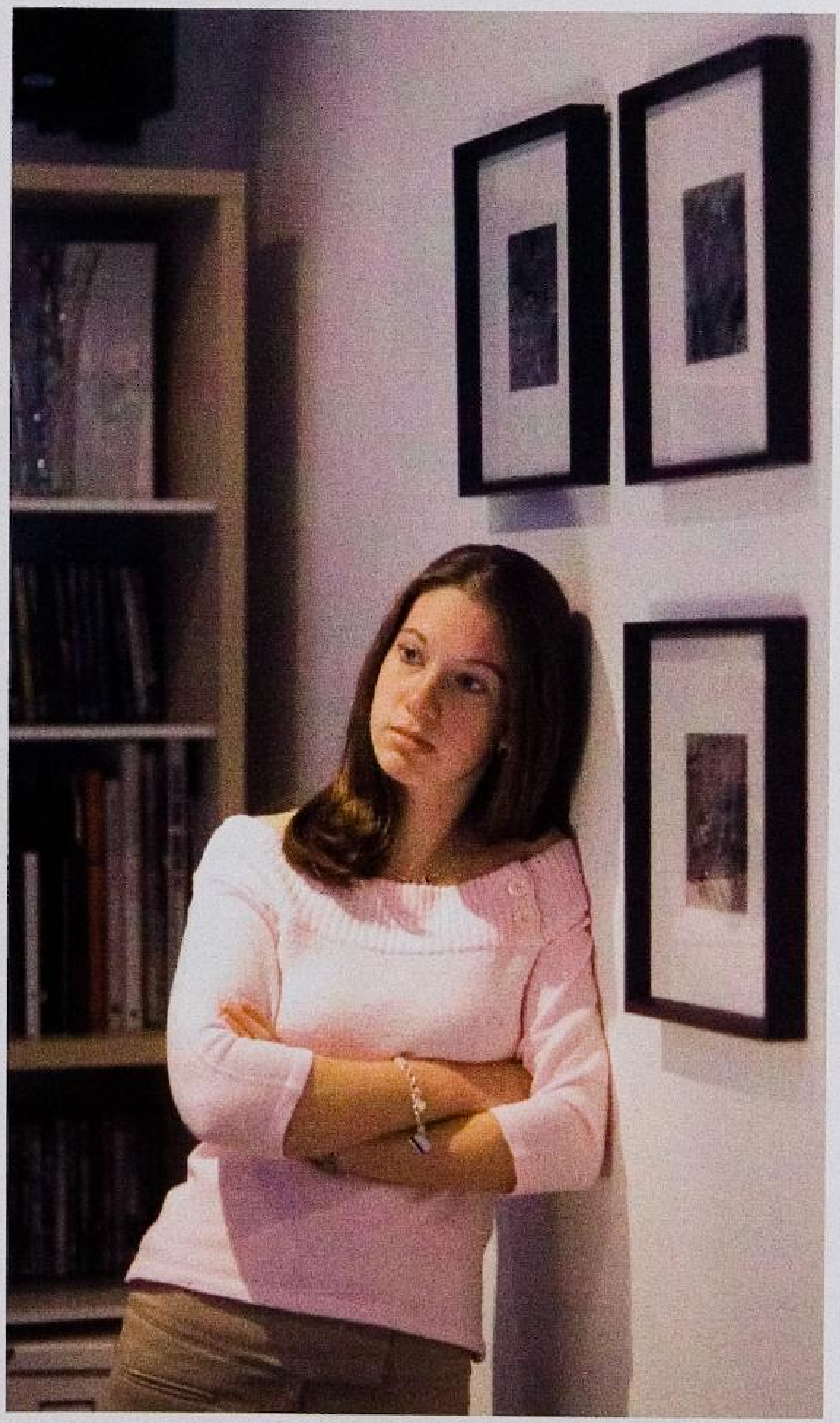
Different lights create different effects, so it is worth knowing the qualities that you can expect to obtain from each one. When you take a portrait using a daylight-balanced film (or a daylight setting on a digital camera), an artificial light source will give a different color balance to the image; for example, a normal light bulb will increase the warm yellow and red tones in a portrait, while a fluorescent light will give a green hue. If you do not use a tungsten-balanced film, or select a tungsten light setting on a digital camera, your portraits will have a warm glow.

The lights are being used in the room already as either an overall light source to give a soft illumination to the room, or as a strong directional source to pick out details. Use this to your advantage when you are photographing using only room lighting.

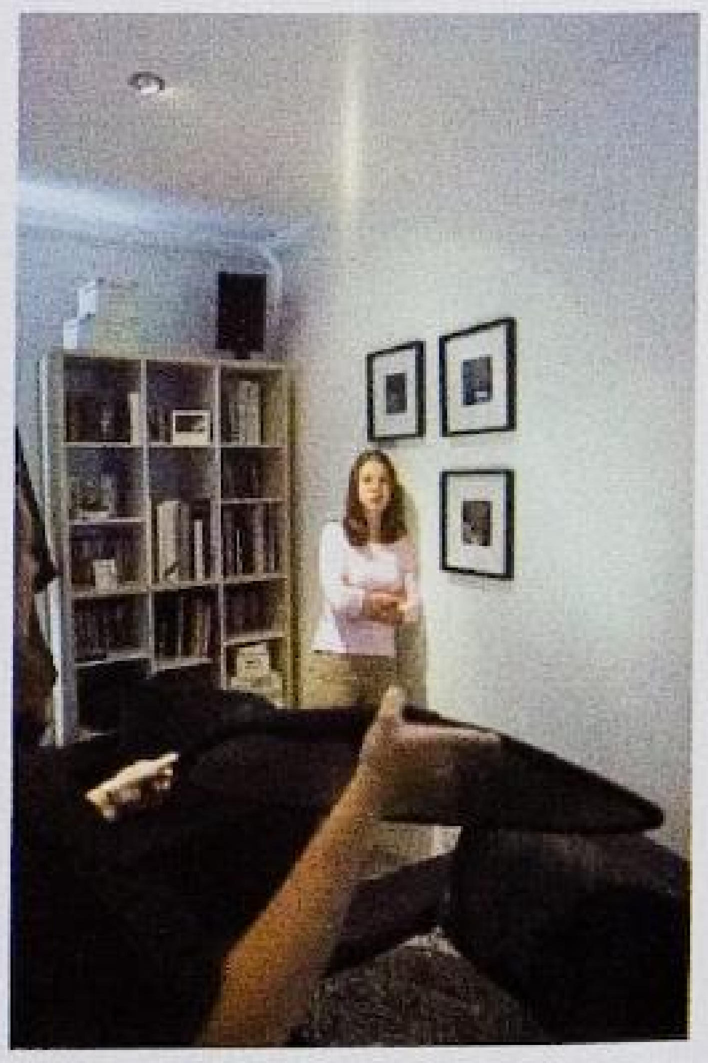
It is important to understand the use of the ambient light within a room, as it will lift the shadow detail and, more importantly, give an overall warmth to the setting. The first thing that I do when I walk into a client's home or office is switch on all the lights to see the effect. I can then decide whether to use the room lighting as just ambient light or as the key light as well. I tend to use a table lamp or an overhead spotlight



▲ **Recessed spotlight**
This room was illuminated only by recessed halogen spotlights in the ceiling, all of which give a strong directional pool of light. The subject was positioned against the wall and lit by one of the lights used to pick out some of the framed pictures.



◀ **Recessed spotlight plus reflector**
To lift some of the detail on the shadow side of the subject's face, I used a silver reflector panel to reflect light from one of the other recessed spotlights.



▲ Reflector panel set-up

as the key light, as they give enough light near the subject for me to be able to set a realistic shutter speed and aperture. If there are more than two people in the portrait, however, I generally find that I have to sacrifice too much in the lighting quality to be able to use it as them as the sole light source.

When I am working with room lighting, I expect to be shooting on exposures of around a 1/15 second—so a tripod is essential to stop any camera shake. I also use as wide an aperture as possible—f/2.8 or more—so that I can shoot with a fast shutter speed or select a higher ISO film speed.

Types of room light

Different lights give different effects; experiment to find out what they do.

Diffused overhead light
This gives an overall soft ambience to the room and is ideal as a fill light, giving some shadow detail.

Light diffused from the side
Most wall lights are diffused and add to the overall ambience. They can also be used as a key light if the subject is positioned close to the light source.

Directional overhead light
This style of light gives a strong directional light; however, the further the light is from the subject, the softer it becomes, giving a broader and more specular light source.

Picture light
A picture light gives very directional light, as it is designed to bring attention to a specific object. The polished interior means that the light is softened on the edges.

Overhead spotlight
Recessed spotlighting combined with halogen bulbs gives a strong, directional light that is very similar to a snooted light, creating small pools of light. Many overhead spot lights can be rotated to alter their direction and position.

Table lamps
A table lamp will be one of two things—a soft, diffused light source with a shade, or a strong, directional spot. Both can be used as either a key light on the subject or as a ambient light in the overall set.

Table lamp only
With the drapes and blinds closed to minimize the amount of natural light coming through the window, I used a halogen table lamp as the key light. Because of the strong light source, I was able to shoot on ISO 200 film at 1/60 second at f/2.8—fast enough not to need a tripod. The light creeping in from the window lifts a little of the shadow detail, but does not distract.

Table lamp and overhead spotlights
With the recessed room lighting switched on, giving a strong directional spotlight from the ceiling, there is a dramatic increase in detail.

Split lighting with table lamp
With the table lamp positioned close to the subject, a strong highlight is given to the one side of the face, increasing the depth of the shadow on the other side.

Table lamp plus ambient room lights
With the room lights switched on and the subject's face tilted toward the table lamp, the lighting effect is much softer.

Using Flash on Location

When you are shooting on location, the light source is not always where you need it to be, or strong enough to light the subject. By using portable flash, you can control the position of the light as well as its intensity.

The quality of natural light depends on the time of the day and year, as well as on the weather conditions. Most of the time we are willing to work around these conditions, using faster ISO readings, longer exposures, and wider apertures, but by introducing a supplementary light source such as a portable flash, you can work in any conditions.

Adding basic flash

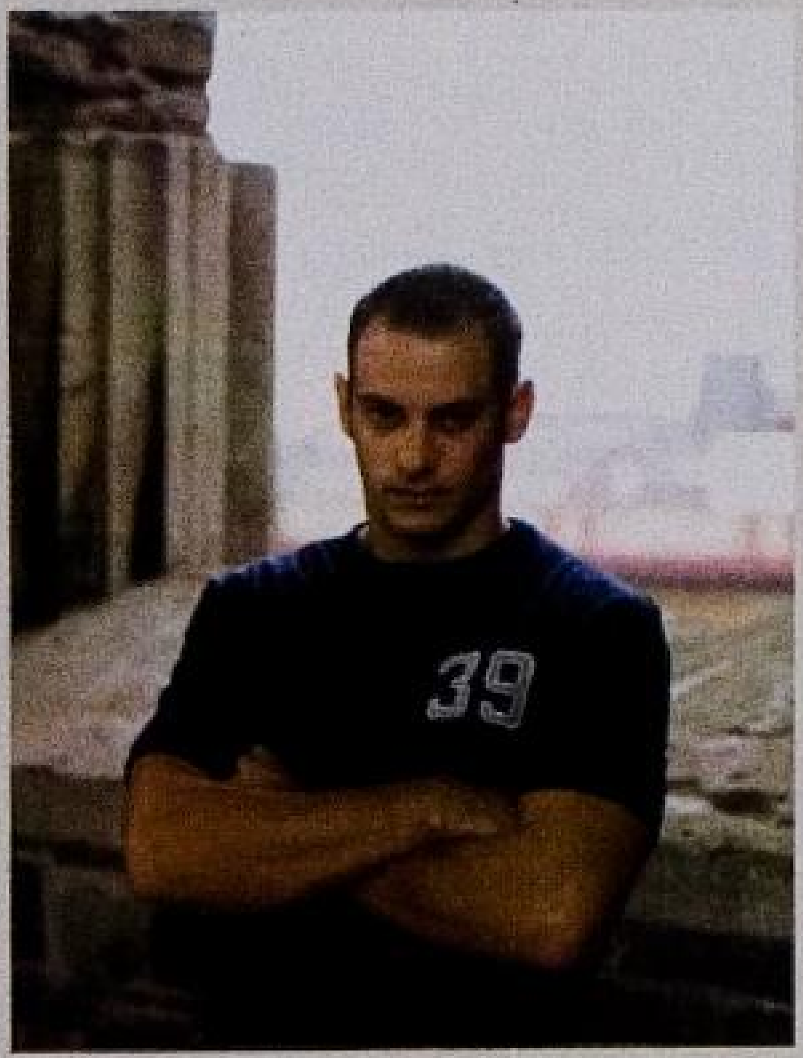
Supplementary light should add to the quality of the portrait and not detract from the overall image. Its function is either to illuminate the shadows as a fill light, or to add a directional light source to the subject as a key light.

The effect of the flash in a portrait will be determined by the power setting of the flash unit; many of the available flash units are accurate in their output, but it is better to have accurate control by setting the flash manually. With the flash on manual, you can set its power output to give an accurate power setting using an independent meter reading. If the reading is too high, either reduce the power setting or move the unit away—and vice versa if the reading is too low. As a basic guide, the flash output should be set at one and a half stops less than the ambient lighting if it is being used as a fill light, or to the desired exposure if it is being used as the key light.

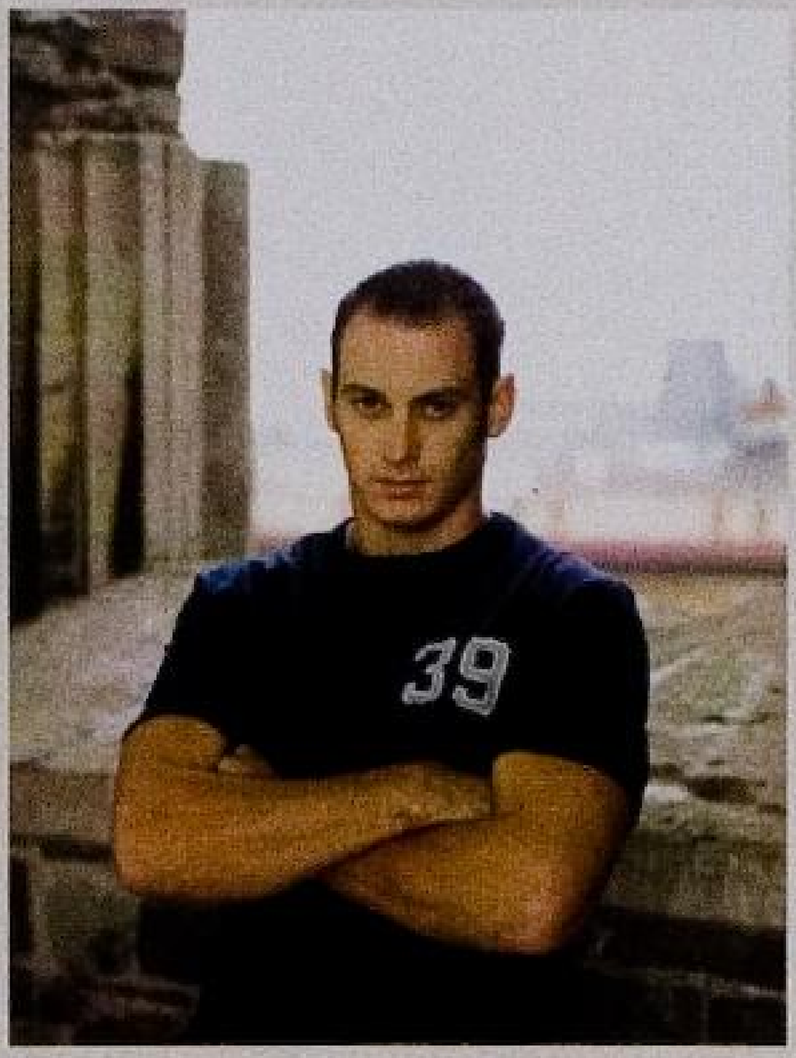
Using two or more portable flashes

Using two or more portable flash units will give you the ability to mimic more studio lighting techniques, including accent lighting, rim lighting, and increasing separation between subject and background. To get the most out of portable flash units, mount them on either a stand or a tripod so that you can position them accurately. Fire the flashes from the camera, using remote infrared or radio sensors to trigger them; this allows you to set up the lighting quickly and easily. Each flash unit should be set up independently and a meter reading taken from the subject's face from each unit in turn. One unit should act as a key light on the subject and one should act as a fill light in exactly the same way as in a studio environment.

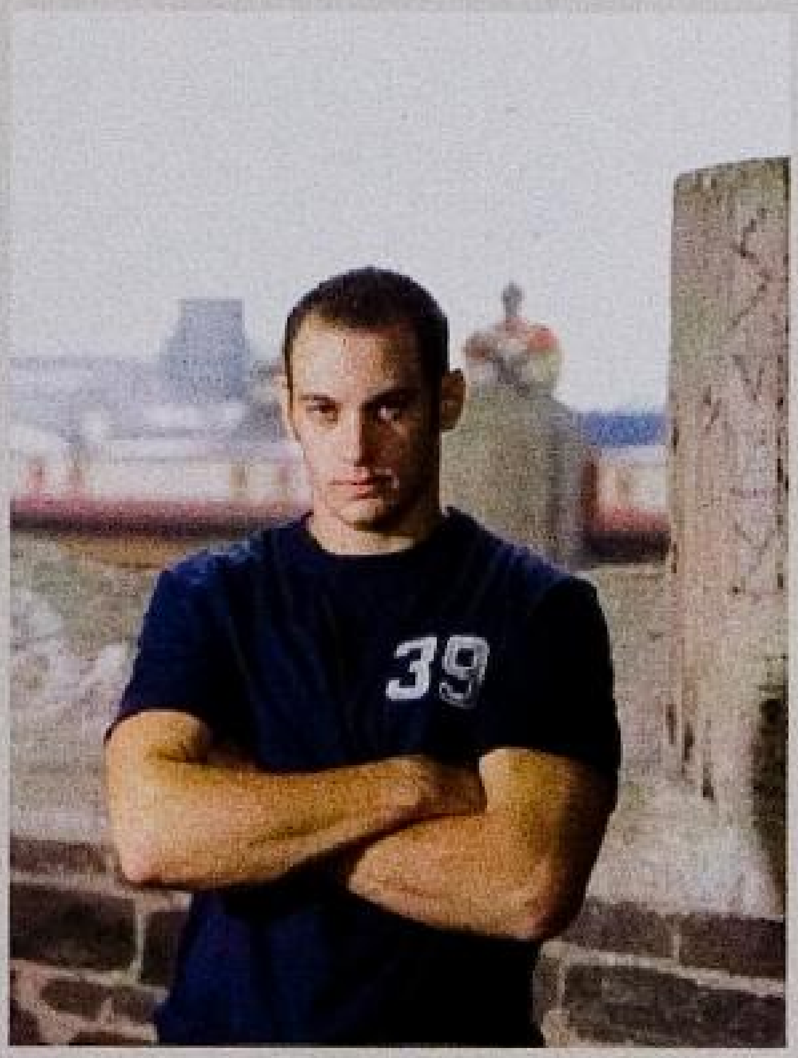
Using one portable flash
These three images show how using a portable flash, first on camera and then off it, can make subtle but important differences to the quality of the portrait.



Ambient light only
Strong light behind and soft light to the sides of the subject have created detailed shadow areas overall, but the lighting has little contrast on the subject and setting, giving a flat look to the face.



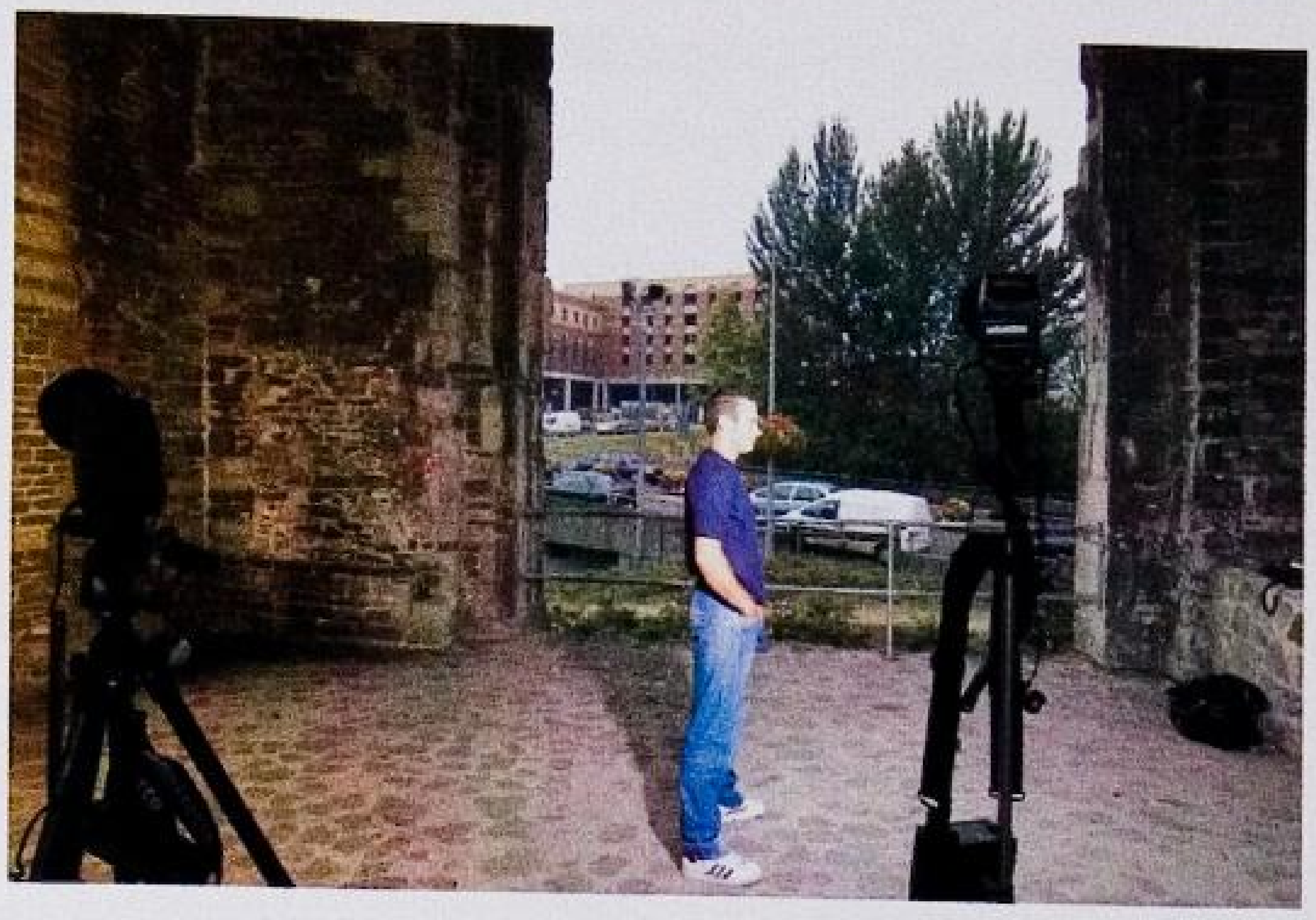
On-camera speedlight
An on-camera speedlight illuminates both subject and background evenly. Directing the flash straight at the subject often creates harsh shadows. Here I have minimized the shadows by bouncing the flash off a small piece of white card, which is a part of the speedlight.



Portable flash as a key light
Used off the camera, the portable flash acts as a strong key light, giving direction to the light source and increasing the shadow on the subject.

Enhancing the subject and setting with multiple flash

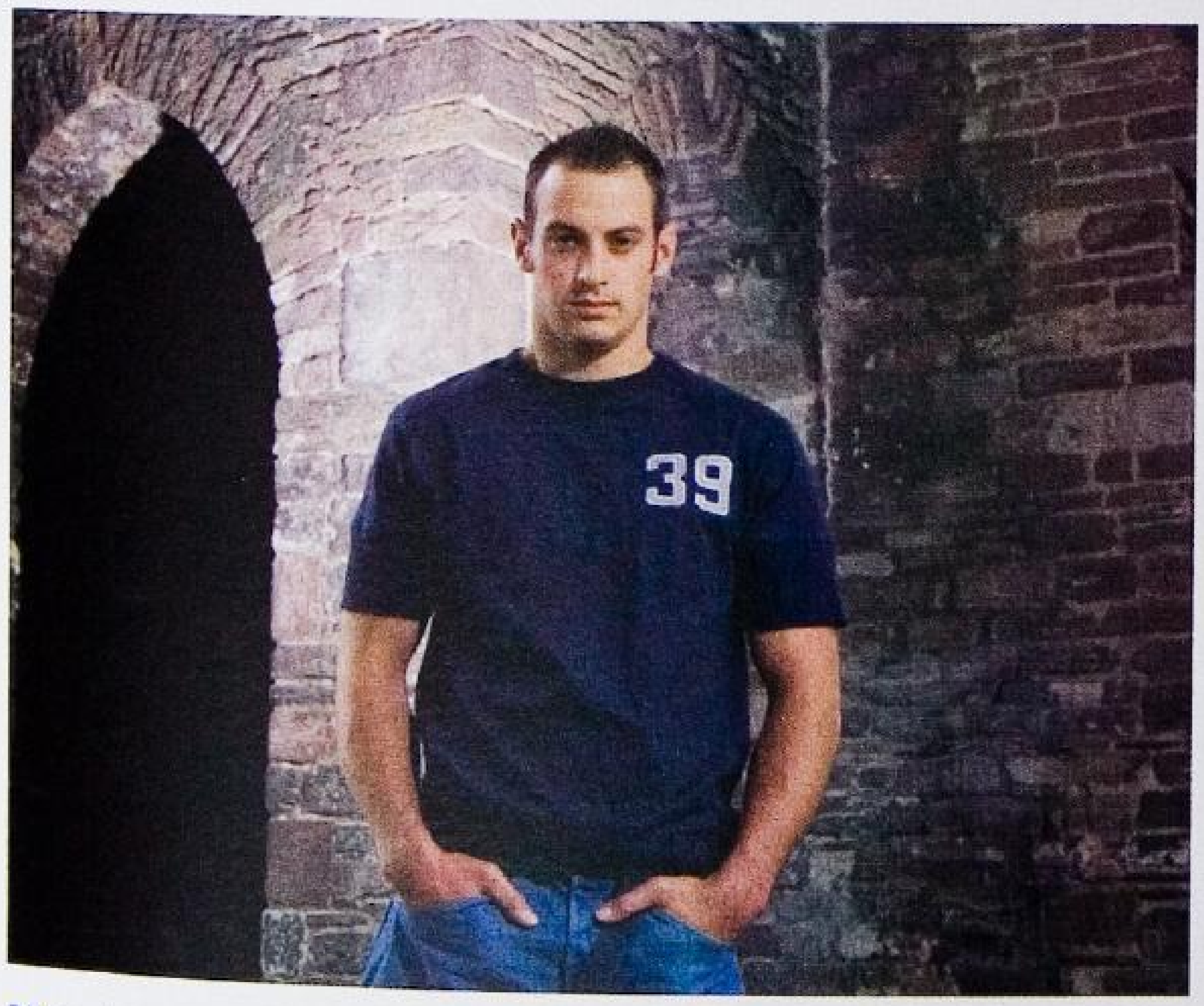
This selection of images shows some of the effects that you can create by introducing a second portable flash to a portrait. The exact effect depends on where you position the flash in relation to the subject.



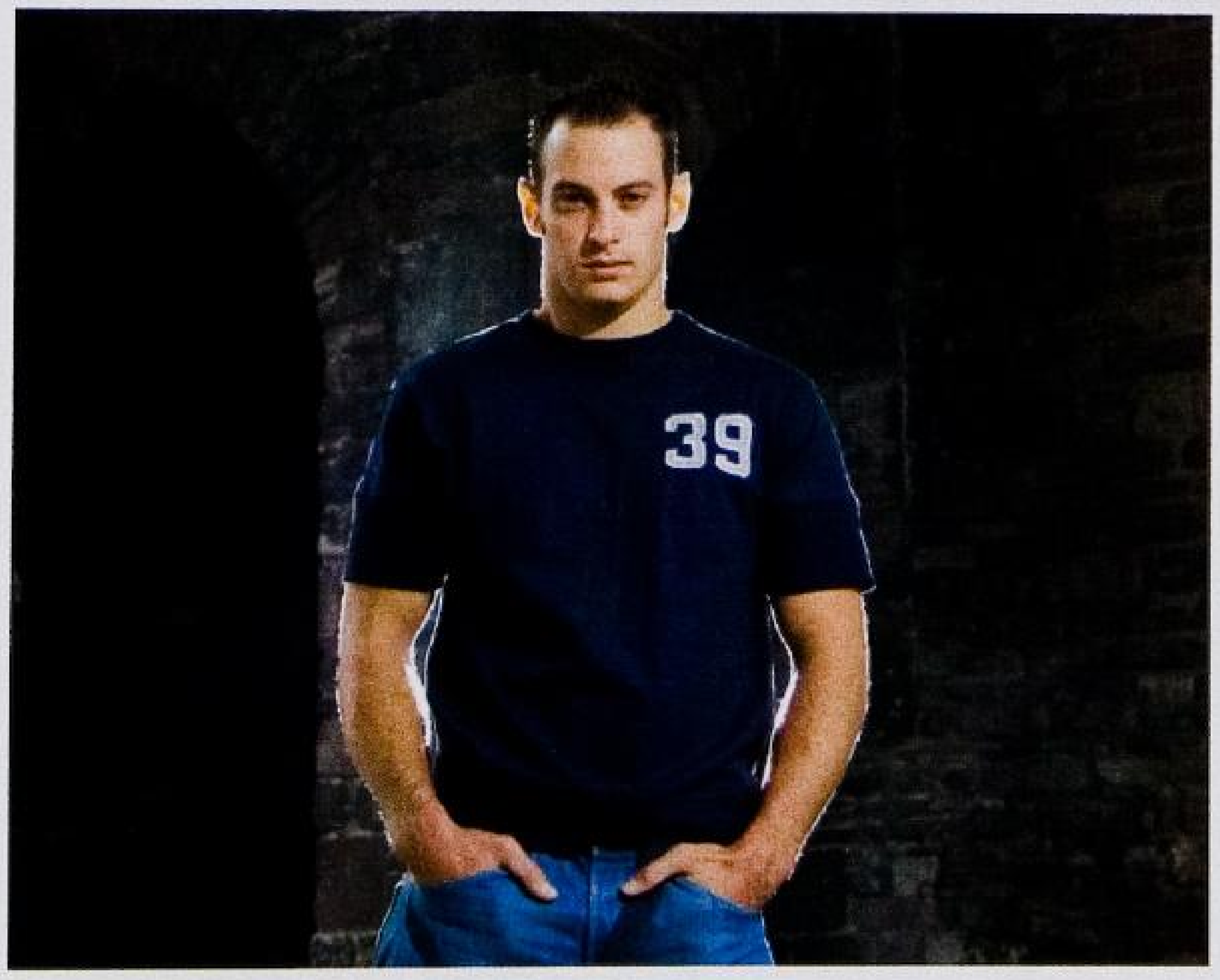
Flash set-up
Mounting the portable flash units on either a tripod or a lighting stand allows you to position the light accurately. Adding a pistol grip to the top of the light stand will enable you to tilt the flash unit up or down and from side to side to give fine adjustment.

Accent lighting
To give an accent light to the face, I positioned the second flash slightly behind the subject, angled to highlight the right side of his body.

Illuminating the background
Here, I turned the second flash away from the subject and used it to give a wash of light to the background. This increases the separation between the subject and the background.



More intense background lighting
To light the background more dramatically, I positioned the second flash directly behind the subject and pointed it onto the wall to give a brighter illumination and increase separation.



Rim lighting
Here, I aimed the second flash directly at the subject's back, creating a halo or rim light effect.

Combining Flash with Gels

Multiple portable flash units allow for a far more creative use of flash on location. Combine this with colored gels to give you imaginative and professional-looking portraits.

Each portable flash unit should be used in the same way as in a studio set-up to bring your backgrounds and subject to life. You will find that this instantly gives a more three-dimensional quality to the portrait.

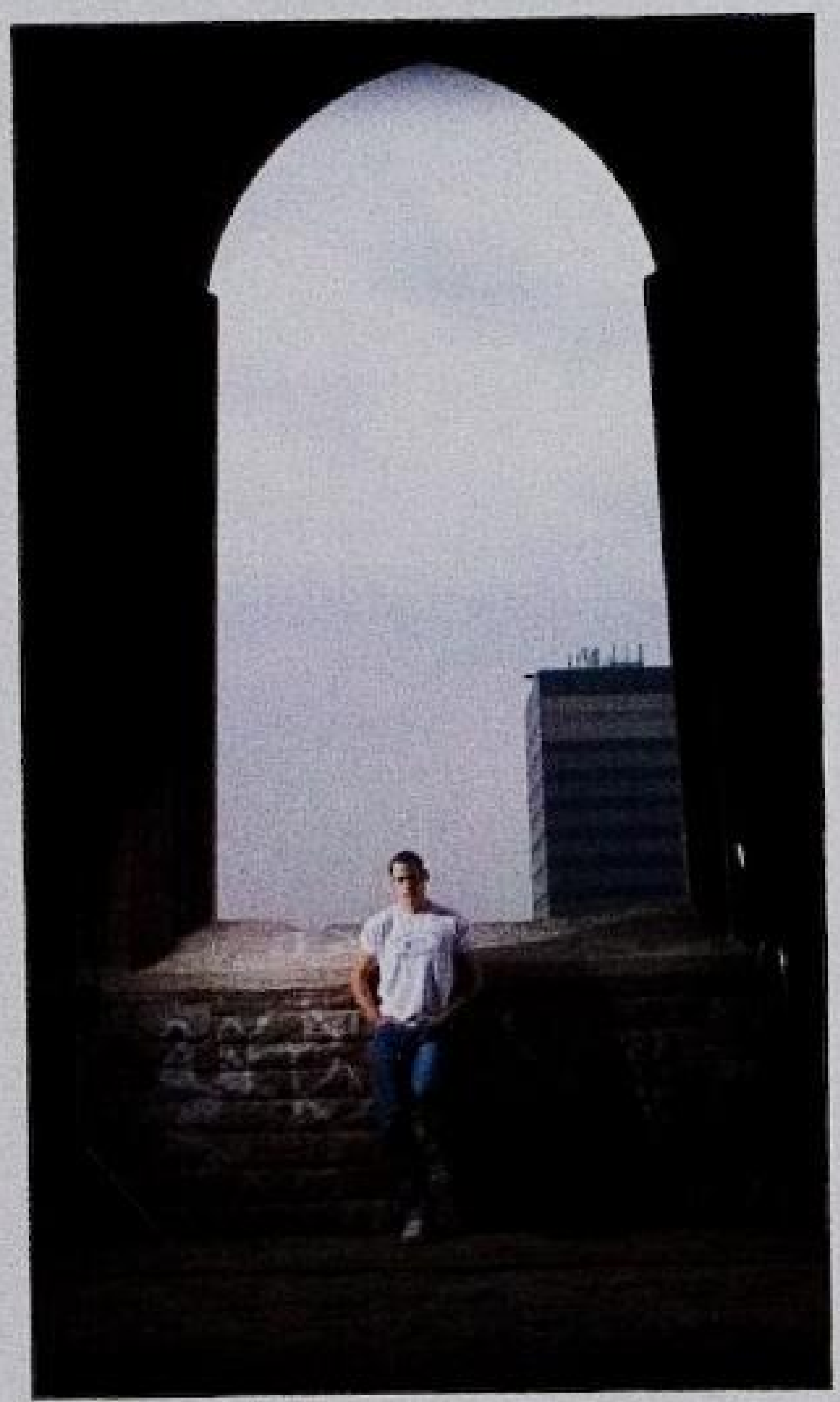
Adding colored light to the background
By adding a colored gel to the background, you can completely change the mood and intensity of the shot, in the same way as theater lighting on a stage. Warm colors (yellows, reds, and ambers) give a warmth to the location, while blues and greens give a feeling of coldness—but all will add intensity and drama to the background of the portrait, unlike in the studio, when gels are usually used to change a blank canvas or create a subtle color harmony. Take care when using gels on a setting, as the gel can quickly lose the effect of the location—especially if it is allowed to dominate the setting in intensity or if it changes the overall color hue.

Coloring setting and subject
When using multiple colored gels on a location portrait, I tend to use one color to light the subject and another to light the background. This gives more impact and increases the drama of the image.

When you do this, however, you must think about the effect it will have on the subject and

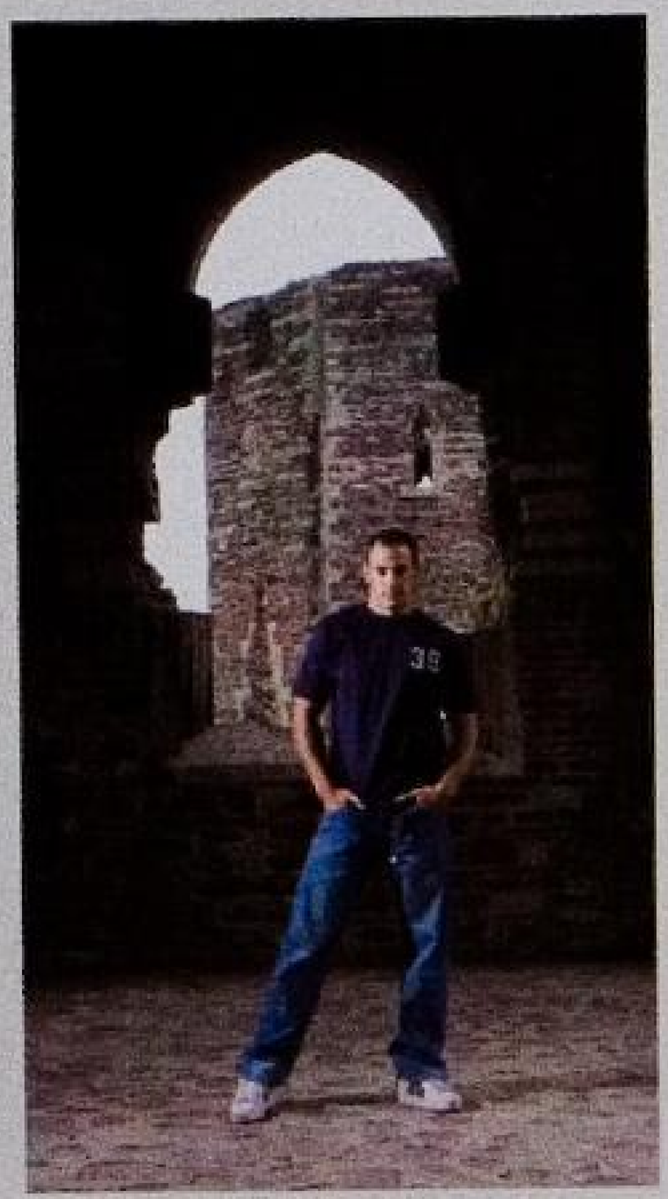
Using shutter speed to control detail
When the sky behind the subject is brighter than the light that falls on the subject, either the sky will be overexposed or the subject will be very dark, with little detail. By using flash to record more detail in the subject, you can change the shutter speed to give different effects. A fast shutter speed will darken the sky; conversely, a slow shutter speed will make the sky brighter.

Metering for the sky
This shot was metered for the sky, which is very bright—hence very little detail is visible on the subject.

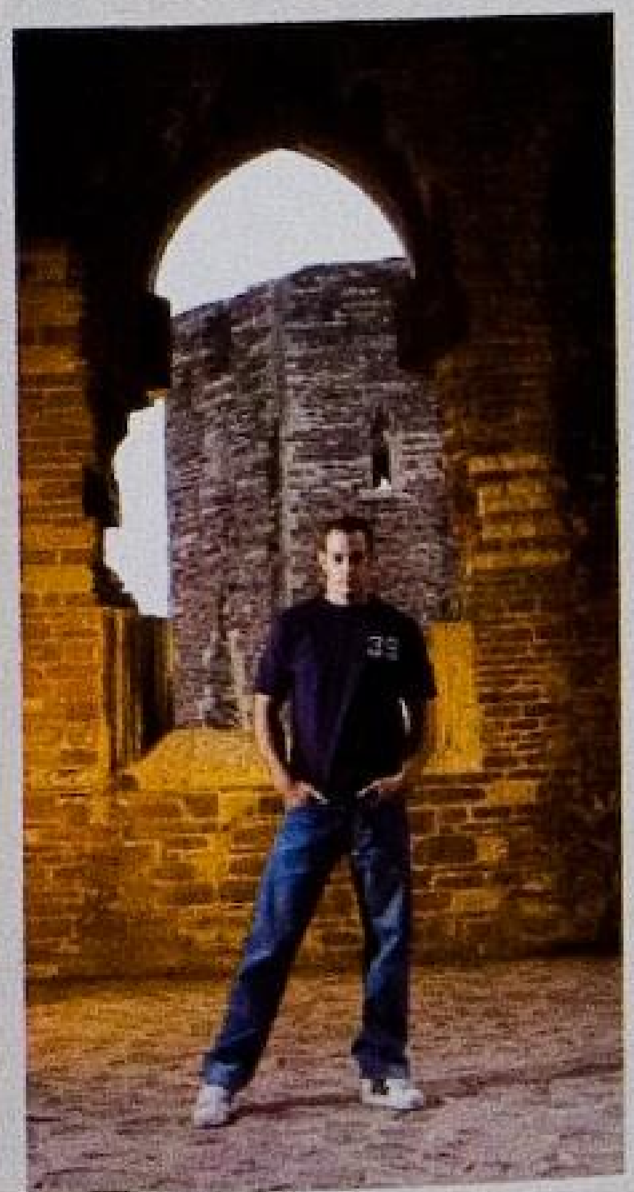


Accenting the subject
The subject dominates the portrait, even though he is the smallest element in the frame, because he is now the brightest part of the image. He is lit by two portable flash units, one on either side; the one to the left—the key light—is set one stop higher than the sky reading and the other flash unit. The second flash acts as a fill light but with direction, so that it illuminates a little of the shadow detail to the subject's right.

Adding a gel to the background light
Here you can see what happens when the background is lit from the side by a second portable flash fitted with an amber gel. It not only separates the subject from the background, but also changes the mood, as the amber gel brings a warmth to the cold stone environment.



No background light

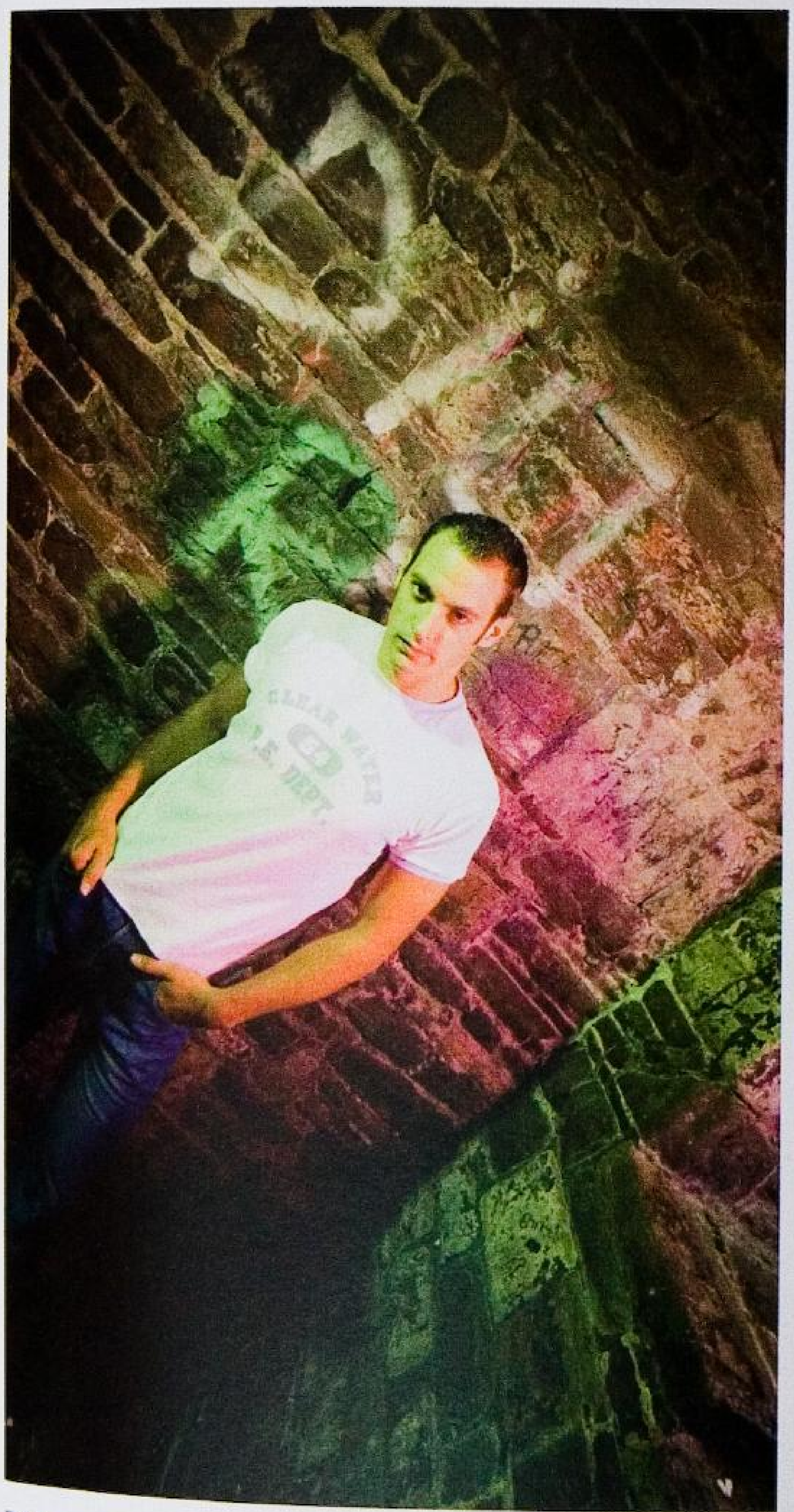


Portable flash with amber gel

his or her clothing, as well as the mood of the image. Remember that if you light a subject from each side, with a different-colored gel on each flash unit, a third color will be apparent at the point where the two lights cross over each other.

When I use colored gels in a client's home, I tend to use the lighting effect in a corner of a room and preferably behind an object such as a sculpture, to add more depth to the portrait.

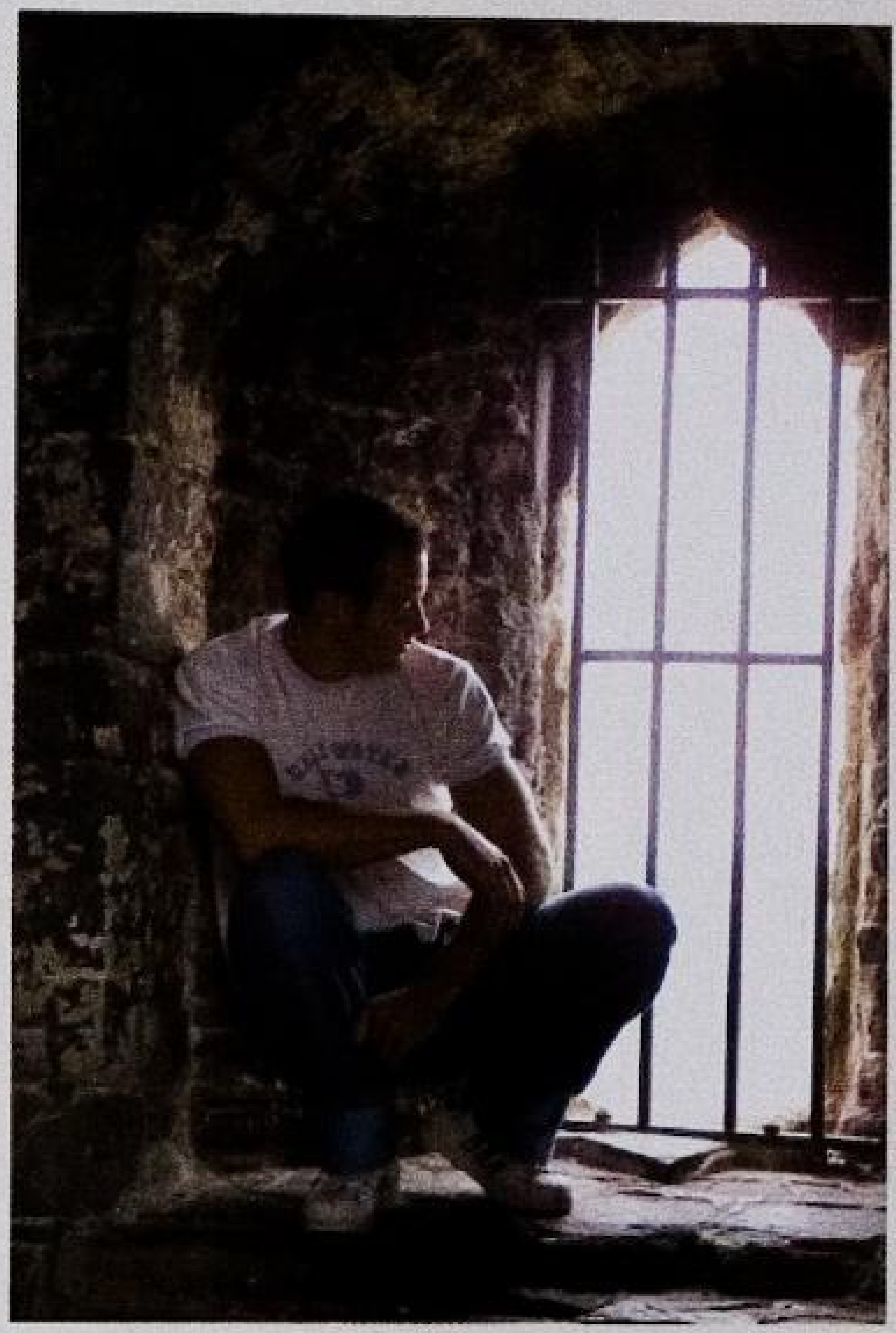
Where possible, the main flash should come from the same direction as any natural light, such a window. Remembering this will make it easier for you to decide which direction to light from; it will also look more realistic to the client, who knows how the light falls in his or her home.



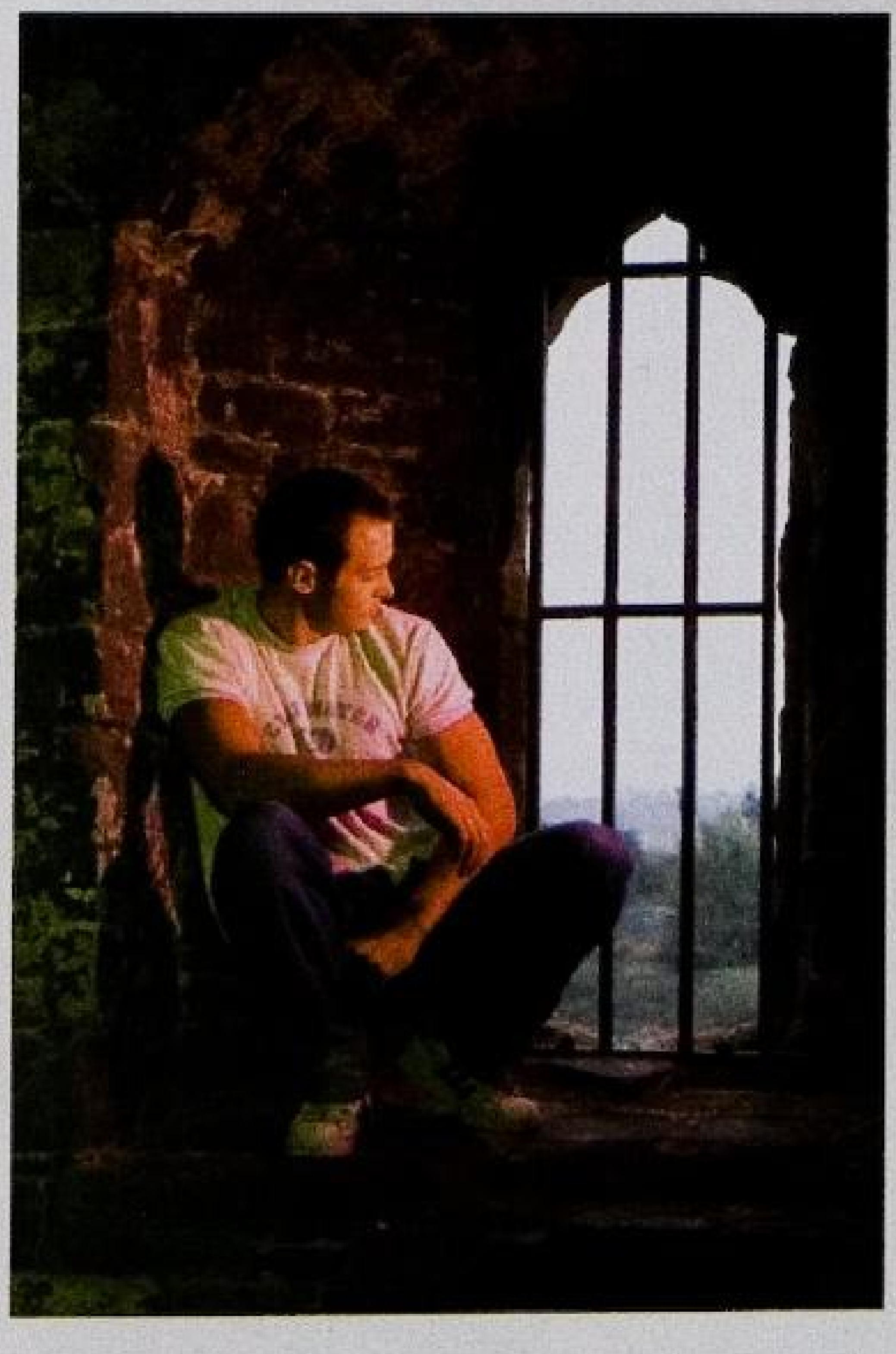
Red, green, and something in between
When two colors cross each other, a third color is apparent.

Theatrical lighting on location

When working on location, supplementary flash can not only dramatically change the mood but also increase fine detail. These two images show the effect. In the first image, the subject is rim-lit by light from the window; the low level of light hitting the subject means that the window is overexposed, creating a subtle flaring toward the camera. In the second image, however, the detail on the subject and the background has been increased and the flare from the window removed. The subject is lit with a red gel and the wall to his left with a green gel, with some of the green light being allowed to spill onto his body.



Burning out the background
This image is lit by window light alone. Because of the low light conditions, I needed to use a slow shutter speed to record detail in the subject—as a result of which the background is overexposed.



◄ Controlling the background intensity
Using a flash to light the subject enabled me to use a faster shutter speed, thus holding detail in the background.

▲ Flash set-up
This image shows the two portable flash units that were used to light the subject and the background, each fitted with a colored gel.

Finding and Using Locations

Most photographers start by shooting on location, as there are no studio set-up costs involved for lighting and backgrounds. Using locations well takes practice.

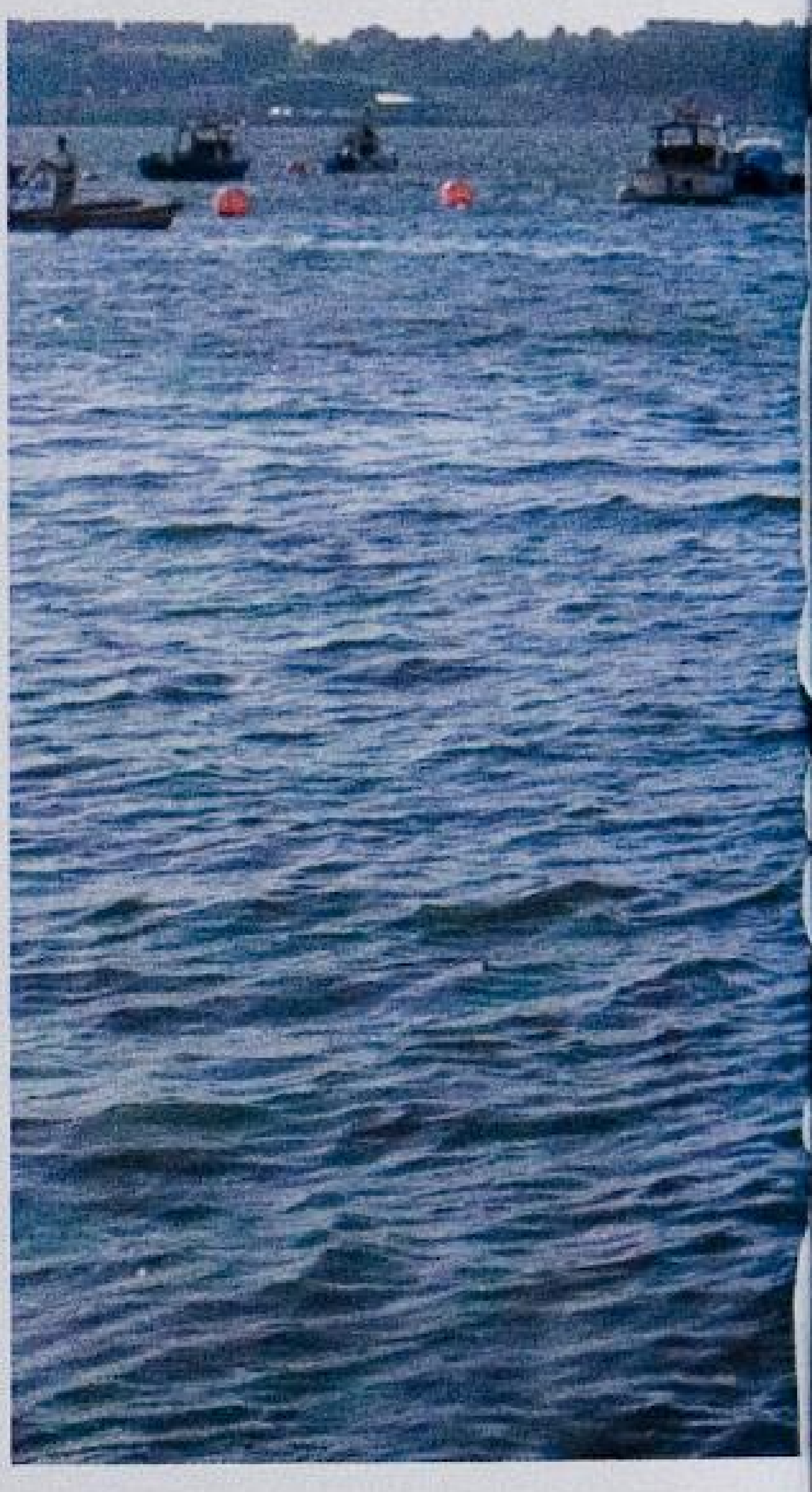
Locations with character and good lighting potential take some finding. Whether I am walking through a city or on a country walk, I am always on the lookout for new locations.

Many locations lend themselves to a variety of photographic styles: an old, ruined castle, for example, can be used in a classical or a contemporary style of portrait, depending on how you choose to handle it. I look for several things in a location—its overall appearance as a structure, its lines for composition, any textures such as stone or wood that I could incorporate, and, of course, the direction of light and how it falls on the location at particular times of day.

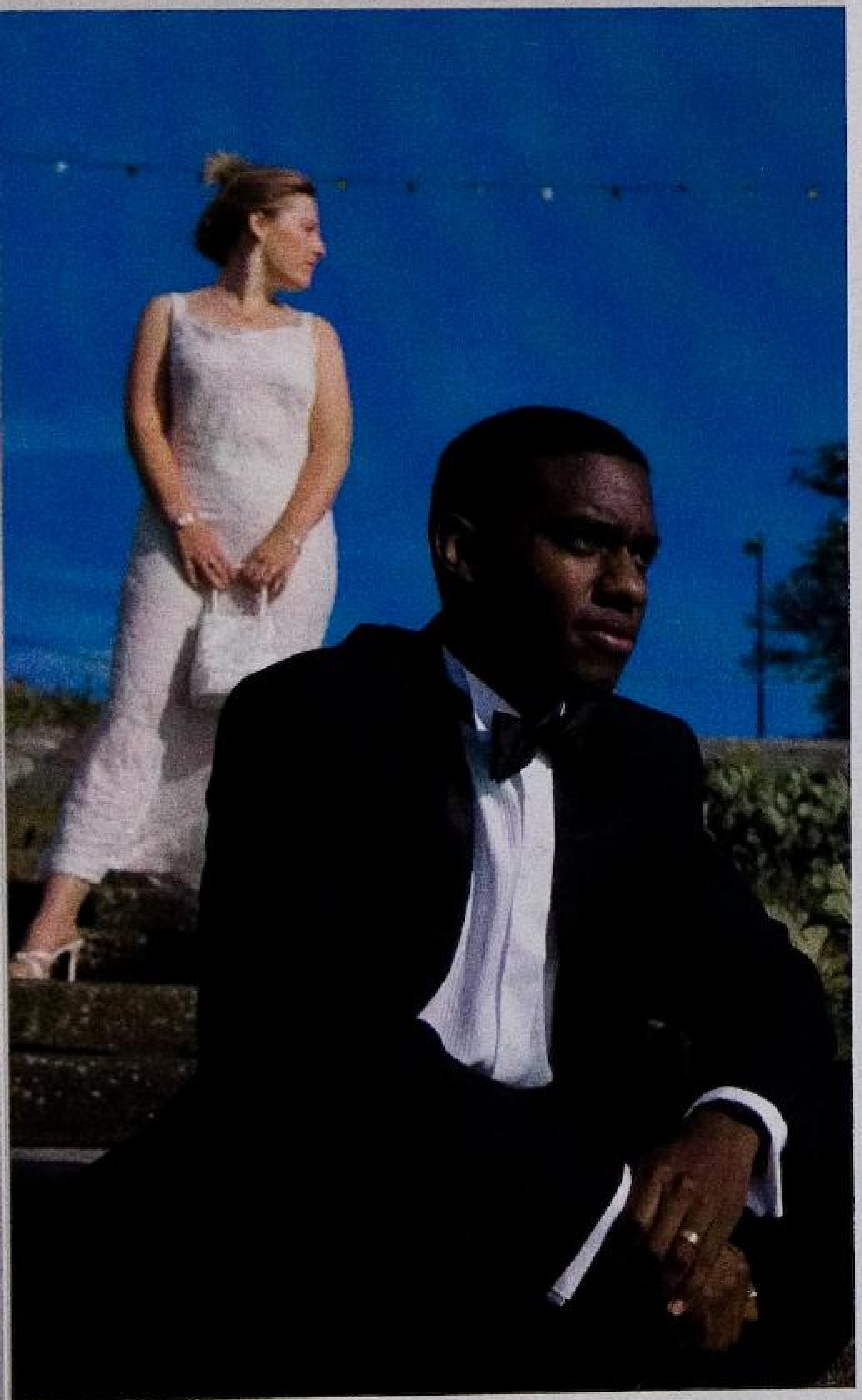
Settings

Some locations are suitable for use as the overall background and setting. An old country house is an ideal example of this: the house and grounds (perhaps slightly out of focus, so as not to distract) can be used to set the scene, and the subject placed away from the house in such a way as to dominate the portrait, even if he or she makes up only a small element of the image.

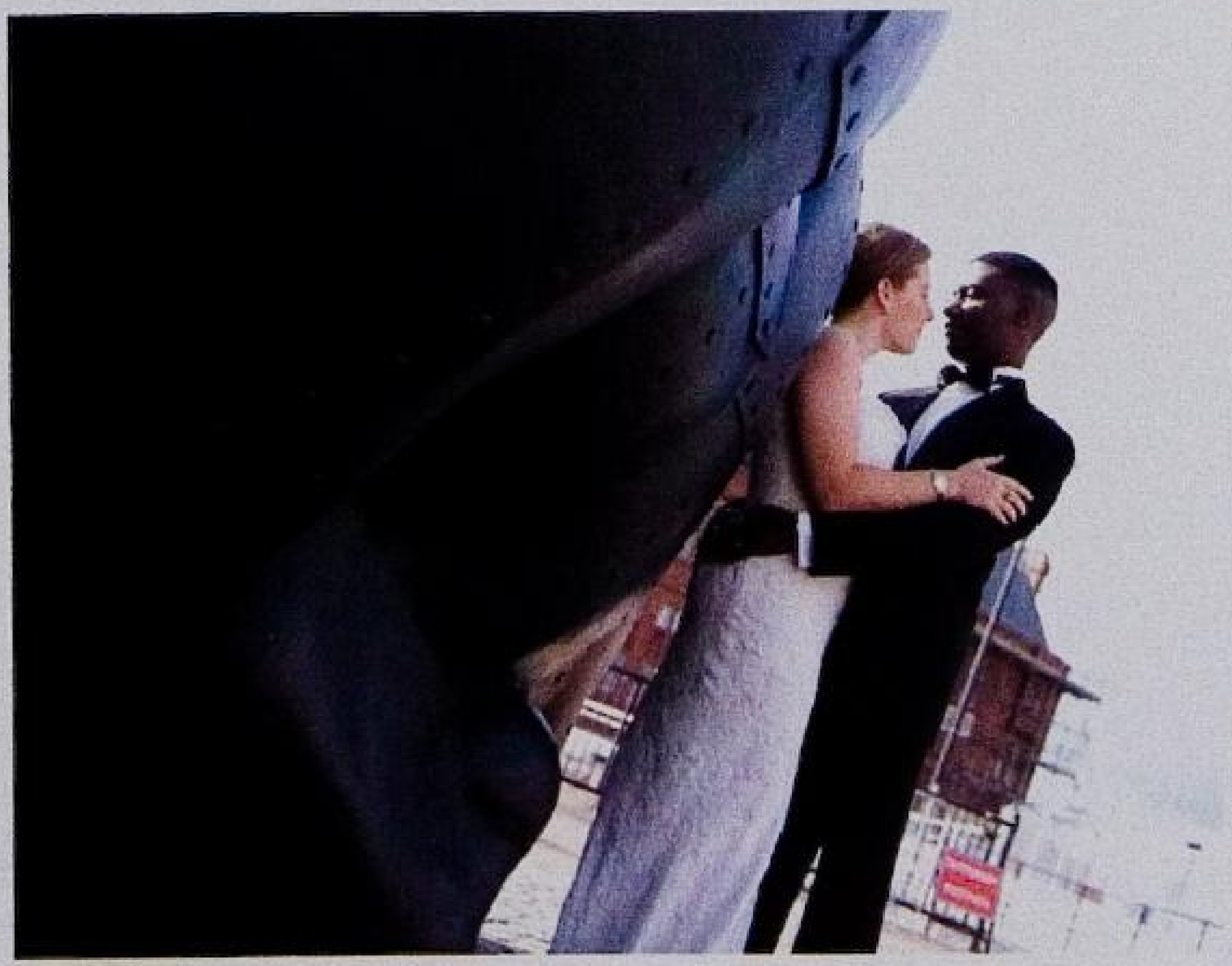
Other locations can be more closely integrated with the subject, and used for their texture and shape. Windows and doorways, for example, are often useful when you want to crop in close on a subject, as they provide a natural frame; from some angles, they can also control the direction of the light. Large pillars are can be used to create vertical lines in the composition; they also give scale to the subject. Bales of hay in a field provide a natural prop and can be used out of focus in the background.



Never be afraid to leave space around the subject, as location photography is about far more than simply making a portrait of an individual. The secret to using any location is to balance the environment with the clothing and subject type: a child



▲ **Using steps**
Steps are an ideal way not only to seat the subject to give variety in a natural setting, but also to vary the heights of the subjects. In this portrait, I seated the man in such a way as to dominate the foreground and used his wife in the background as secondary interest. The low camera angle enhanced the drama of the composition.



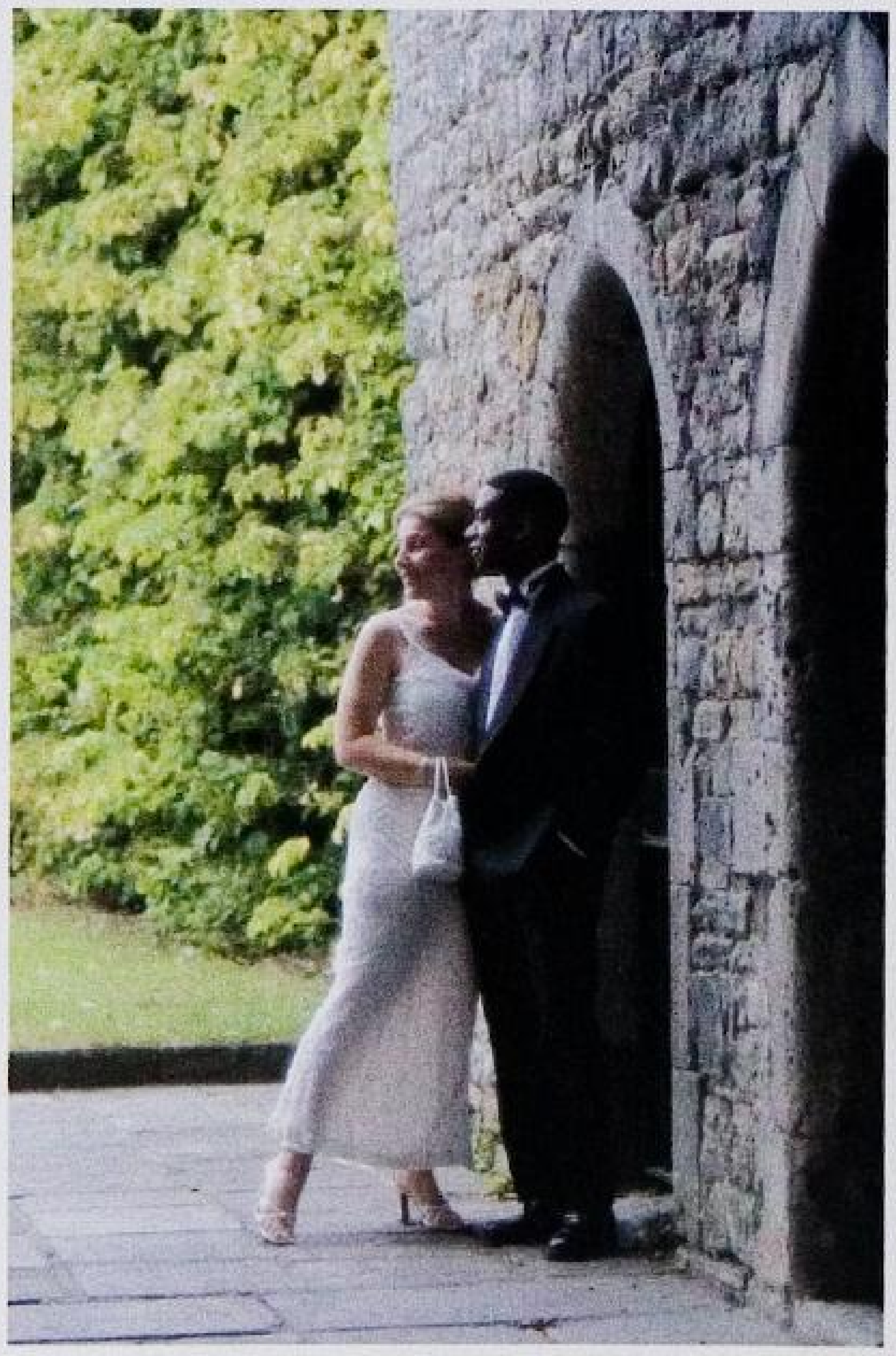
◀ **Using sculpture**
Sculptures, especially large ones, can bring a surreal look to a portrait. Seen from a distance, this sculpture represents the hull of a boat—but when you crop in closer, the face becomes evident and starts to overpower the portrait, bringing a secondary interest to the design.

◀ Space and the setting
Think about the size and position of your subjects in the overall composition. If they are too far away, they will be lost in the landscape; if they are too close, some of the setting will be lost. Here, the subjects have been set to one side to allow more of the harbor to seen. They were positioned to echo the shape of the grassed bank and the wall, giving a stepped effect in the design.

dressed in his or her best clothes photographed in front of a large building, for example, will give a suggestion of class and wealth; photograph the same child in the same clothes in an industrial setting, and the result will be rather more surreal.

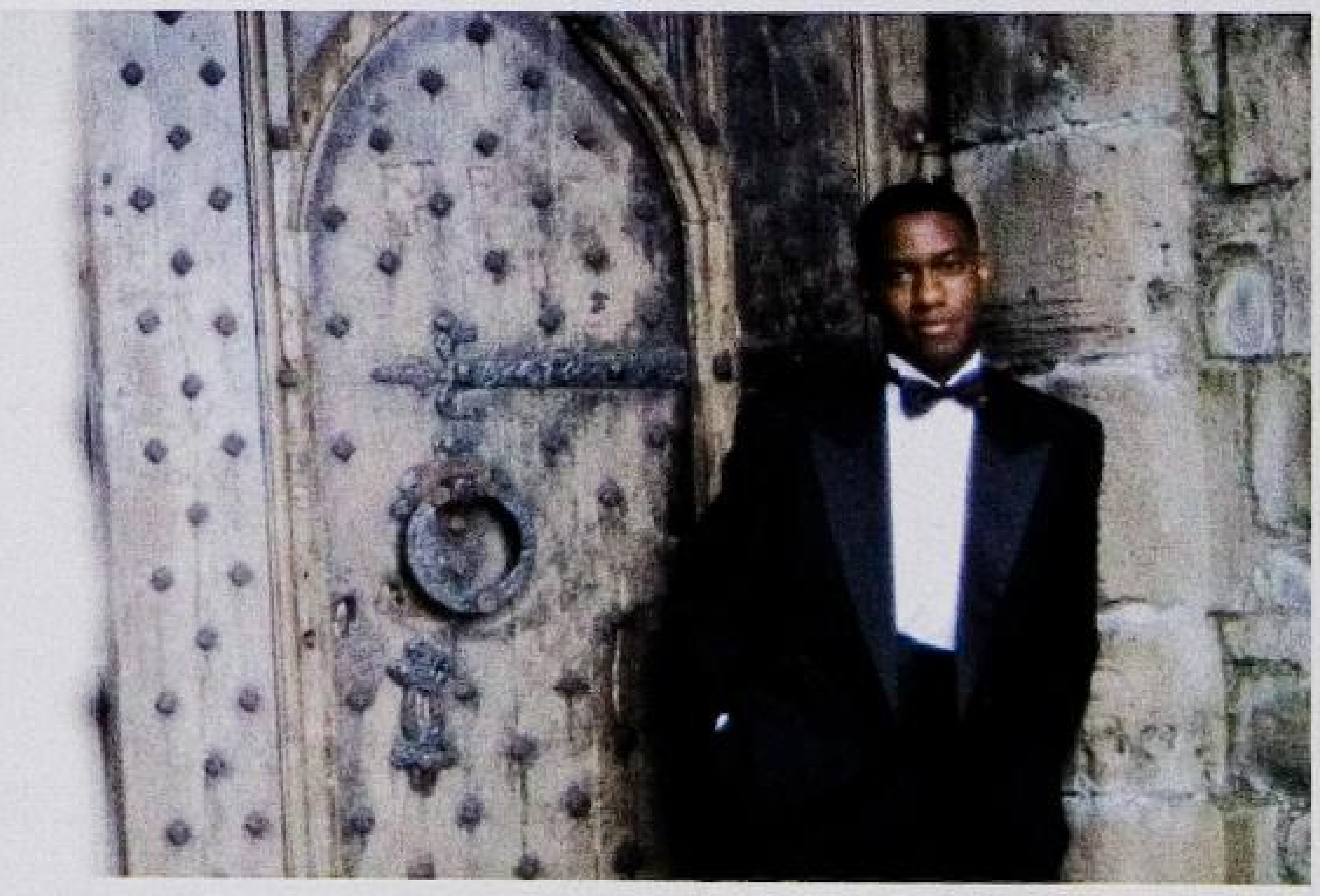
Props

There are many natural props all around us; many of them tend to be overlooked, as they are just a part of the setting, but elements such as railings and stairs are perfect for posing, as your subject can lean against them in a way that looks natural.



▲ Classic setting
This ruined castle and its grounds are the perfect setting for a classic location portrait. The arches of the doorways and the straight edges of the paving stones and building become design elements in the composition. The textures of the foliage and stonework in the background add to the overall mood.

▼ Textures
By cropping in close, the stone wall and old wooden door form a simple, but textured, frame for the image. The subject is placed between the two textured elements to help blend them together, so that they both play a part in the design but do not compete for dominance.



tips

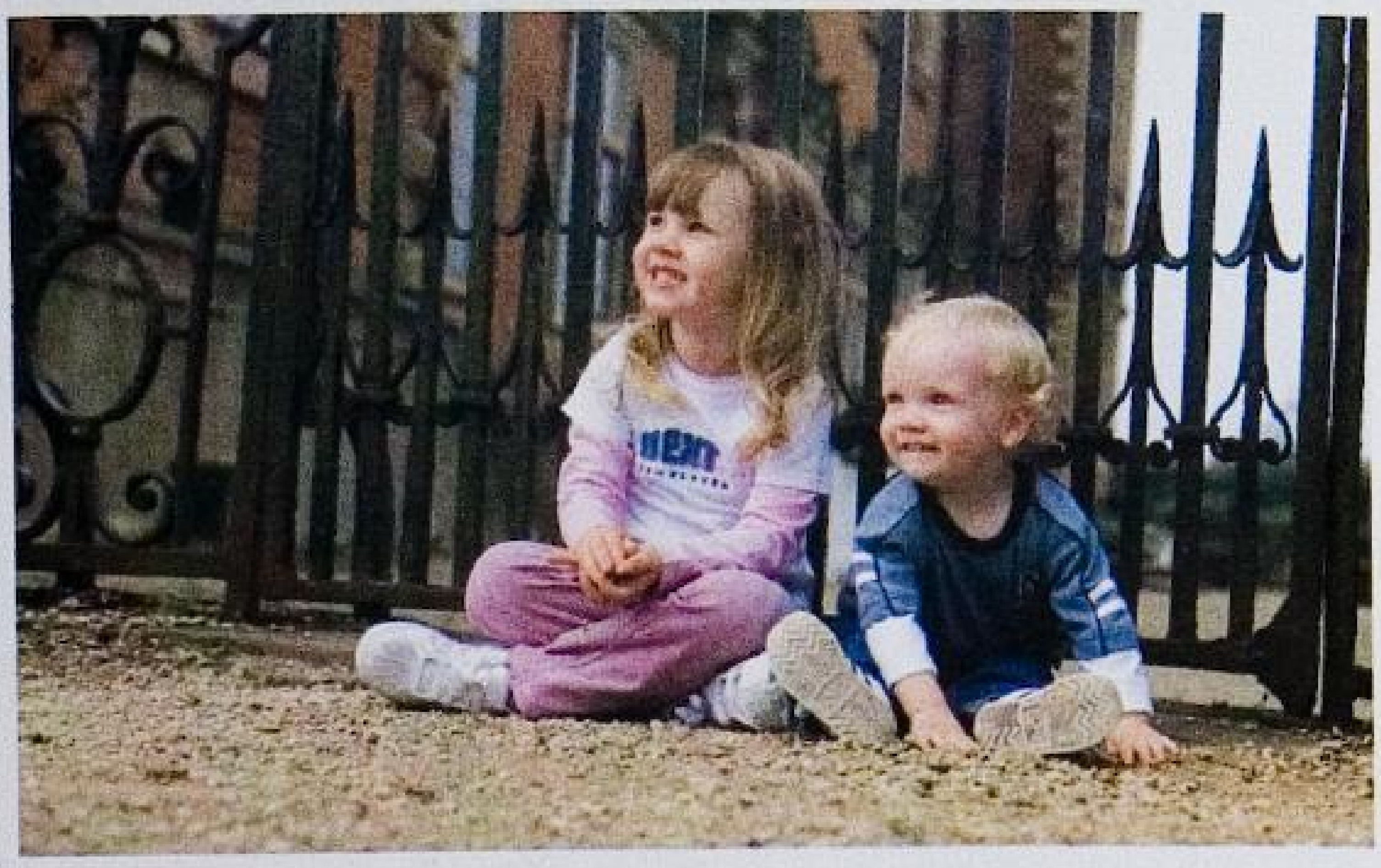
- Steps are a natural way to stagger head heights. This always looks better in a group portrait than having people standing in a straight line.
- A doorway or a row of pillars will give a direction to the light; the opening becomes the key light and the surrounding area becomes a subtractor of light.

Getting the Best out of the Location

Once you have decided on a location, the next step is learning how to identify the best areas in which to photograph.

The secret of successful location photography is to keep things simple. Once you have found your location, get to know it: see how the light changes at different times of the day, and explore the different areas in which you can pose your subject.

If you are new to a location, it is a good idea to visit the place several times before the photo session. In this way, you can see the different qualities of lighting you may encounter, and find out if there are any potential drawbacks such as other people, heavy traffic, or even other photographers—especially if you are photographing in public places. I usually choose three different areas within the location in order to be able to get a variety of shots. This also stimulates the subjects (especially children, who have a low boredom threshold), and keeps their expressions fresh.



Camera angle
When photographing children on location, you should be prepared to work at lower camera angles than normal. Here, the camera is positioned at ground level; the angle also enhances the dramatic fall-off in focus of the gravel in the foreground. The low camera angle has changed not only the perspective but also the background, as different elements are now in view.

The gate
The gate was chosen for its simple metal work and to help separate the subject from the background.

Shooting straight on
With a wide aperture, the manor house is thrown out of focus, which means that the child and the metal work of the gate are fully separated from the background.

Shooting from an angle
By shooting at 45° to the subject and the gate, I was able to reduce the amount of brightness in the sky coming through the railings.

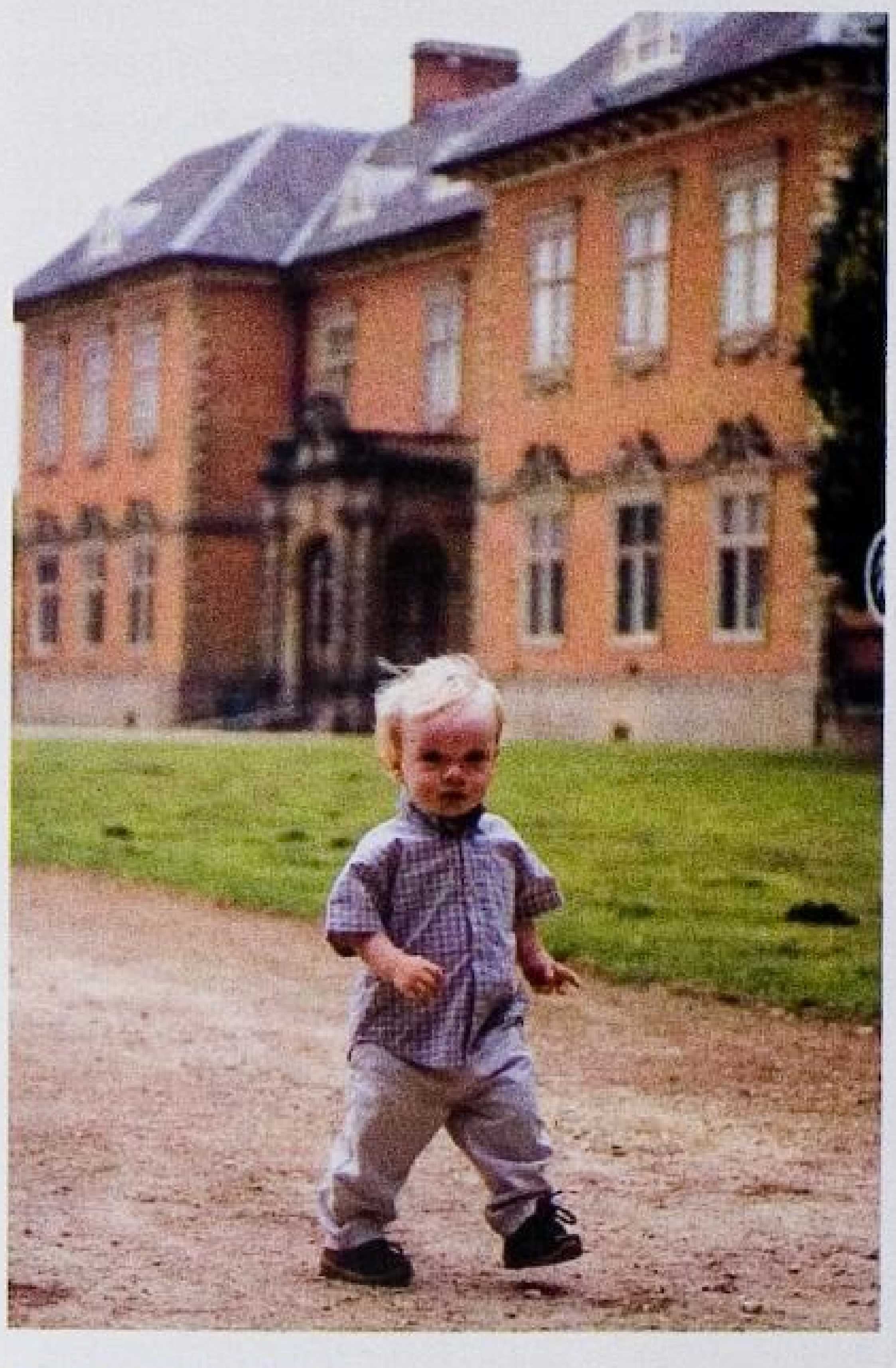
Shooting side on
When the subject is photographed from the side using a telephoto lens, the background is compressed. The wide aperture again throws the background slightly out of focus, helping to give the portrait depth and separate the subject from the background.

For this portfolio of two young children, I chose an old manor house and its grounds as the location. I then selected to use the gate, the gravel driveway, and a wooded area as the three locations in which to shoot. All three were near public thoroughfares, which I knew would act as a distraction to the children, but would create a beautiful setting.

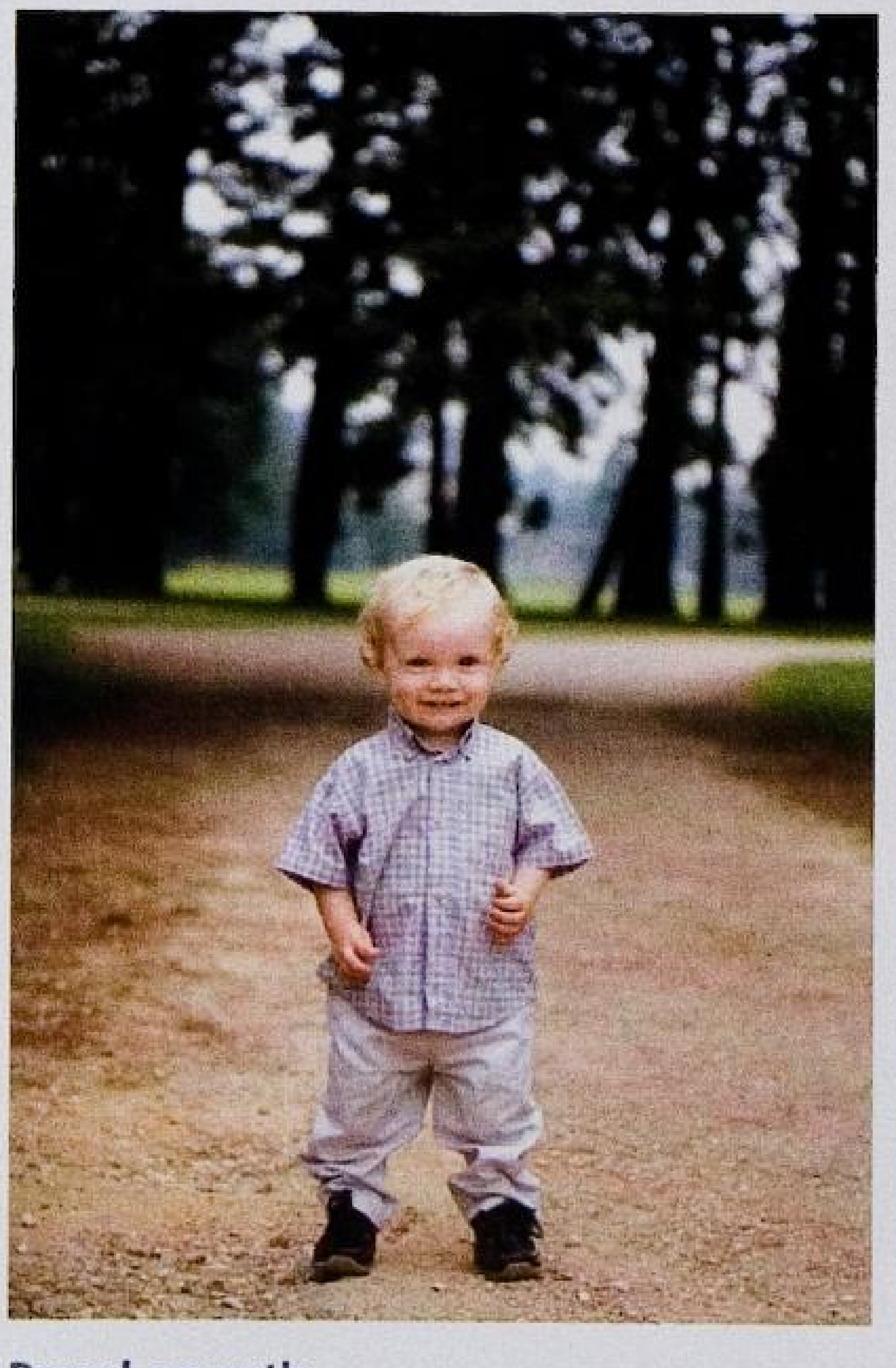
The tree
This particular tree was chosen for its lighting qualities, as its large canopy would subtract some of the light coming from above. The ring of stones in the background also looked interesting.

Natural setting and lighting
This portrait makes use of natural elements in both the setting and the lighting. A wide aperture was used to throw the background out of focus and make the child the point of focus. She is lit from a gap in the trees to the left of the camera, which gives some direction to the soft light. The natural vignette of the lighting given by the canopy of the tree and the worn grass was then emphasized by using a vignette on the camera to slightly darken the four corners.

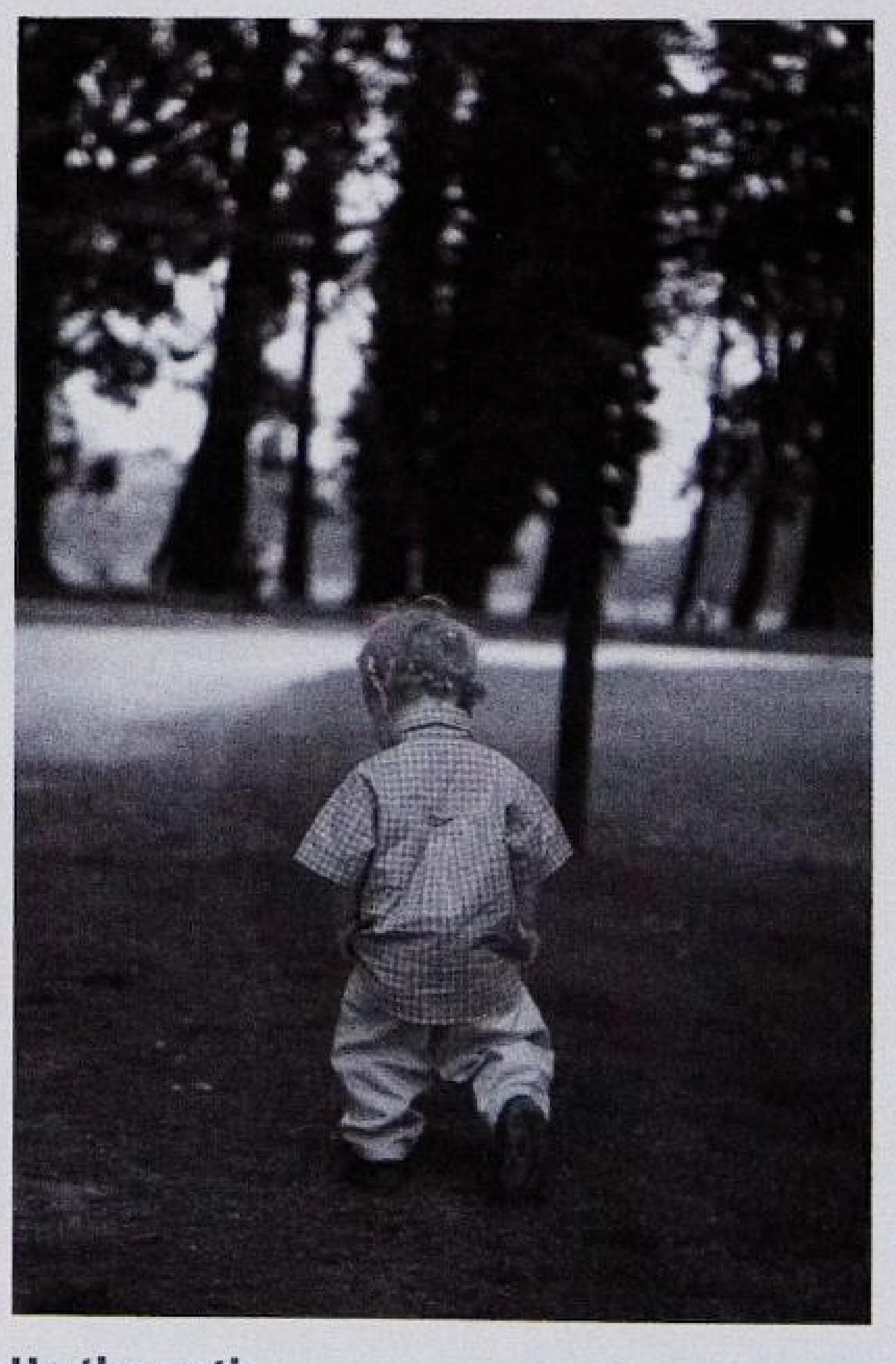
The path
The path was chosen for its simplicity and for the fact that I could shoot from two directions—giving me the choice of either the house or the trees as the background.



Path and house
This portrait shows the effect of using a wide aperture: the house is out of focus, but still instantly recognizable. A silver reflector panel was held in front of the child as he walked, in order to bounce some of the light from behind him back onto his face.



Posed on path
Here, we were able to not only to position the little boy in the center of the path for a symmetrically balanced image, but also to get a great expression. The softness of the light is caused by complete cloud cover.

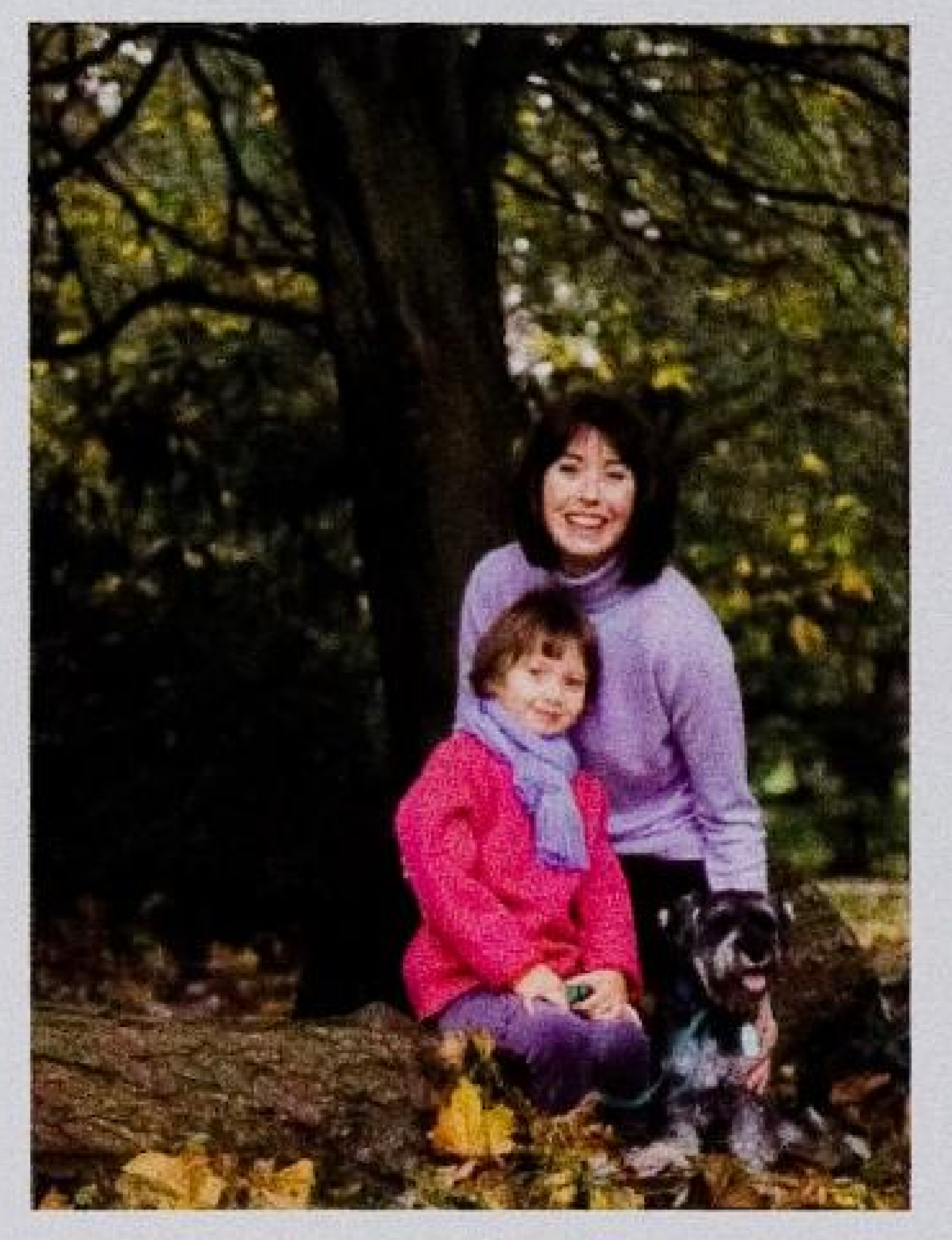


Up the path
This timeless portrait was captured a split second after the posed image when, without warning, the little boy put his hands in his pockets, turned around, and began to walk away from the camera.

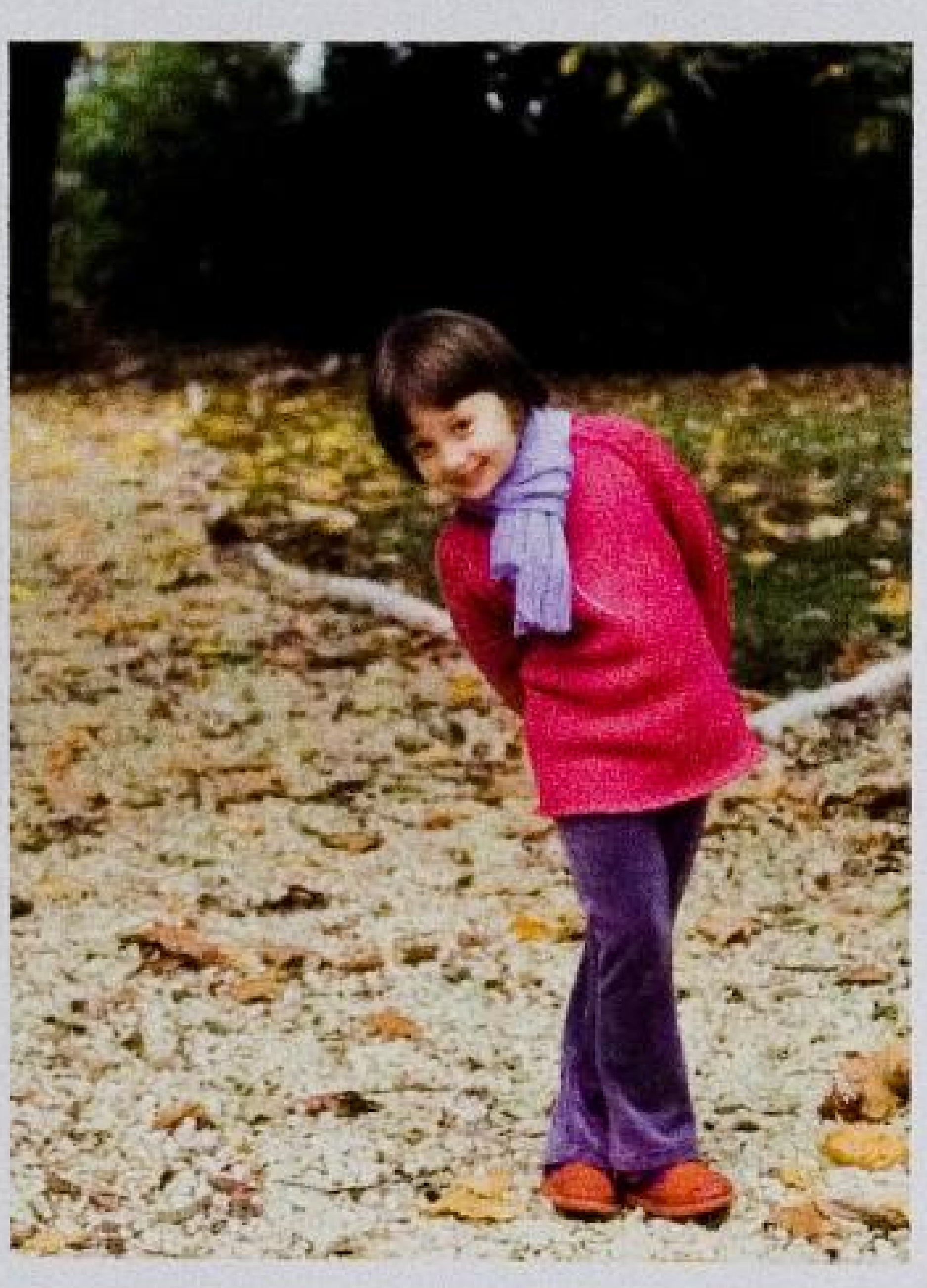
Woodland Setting

A park or woodland setting is a natural choice for many subjects and, with the seasons changing the scenery, it is a perfect place for portraits, no matter what time of year.

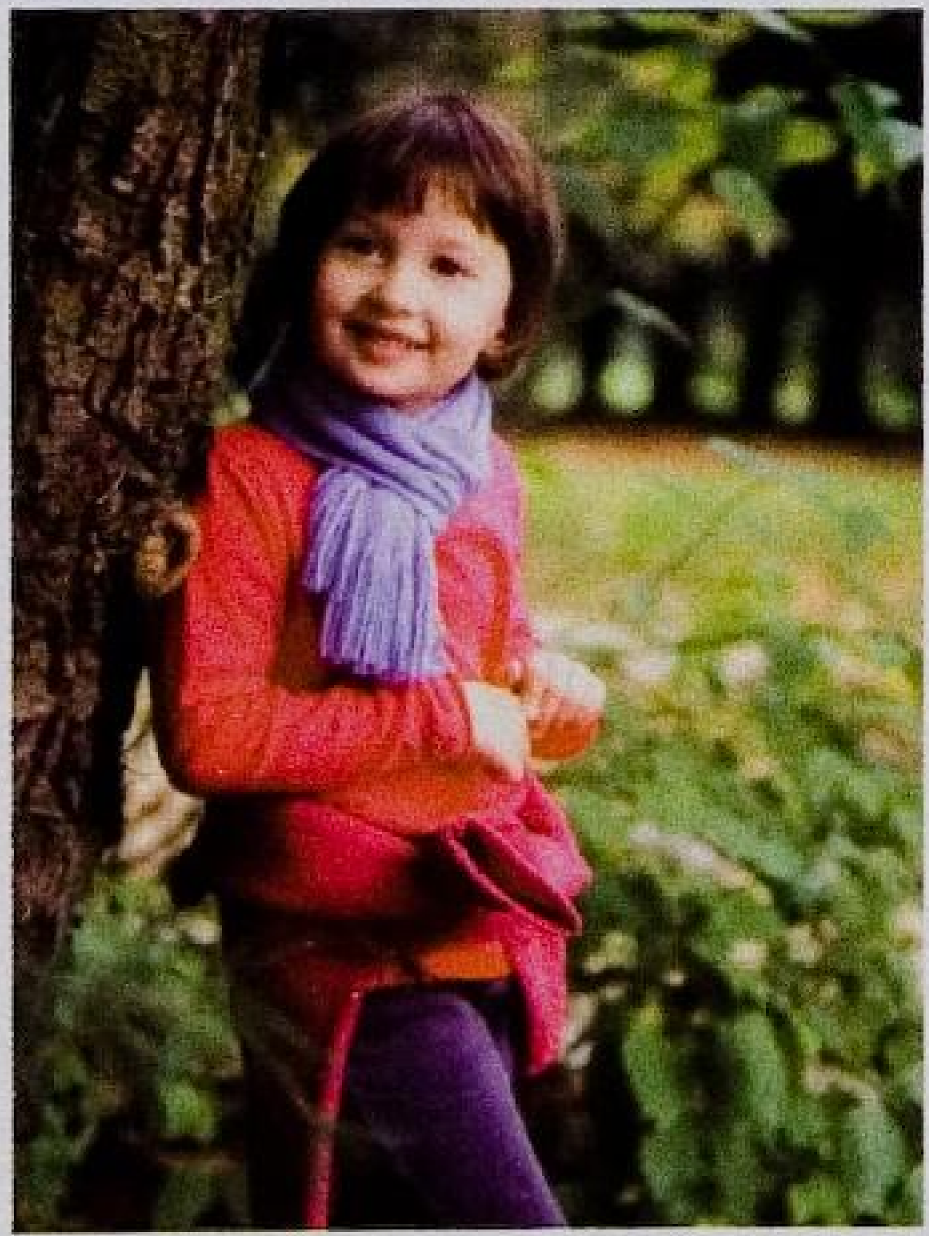
You do not have to travel far to find a woodland location. Most big cities have areas set aside for parks and wildlife, and these are perfect for a portrait backdrop, as well as being a place to escape the pressures of city life.



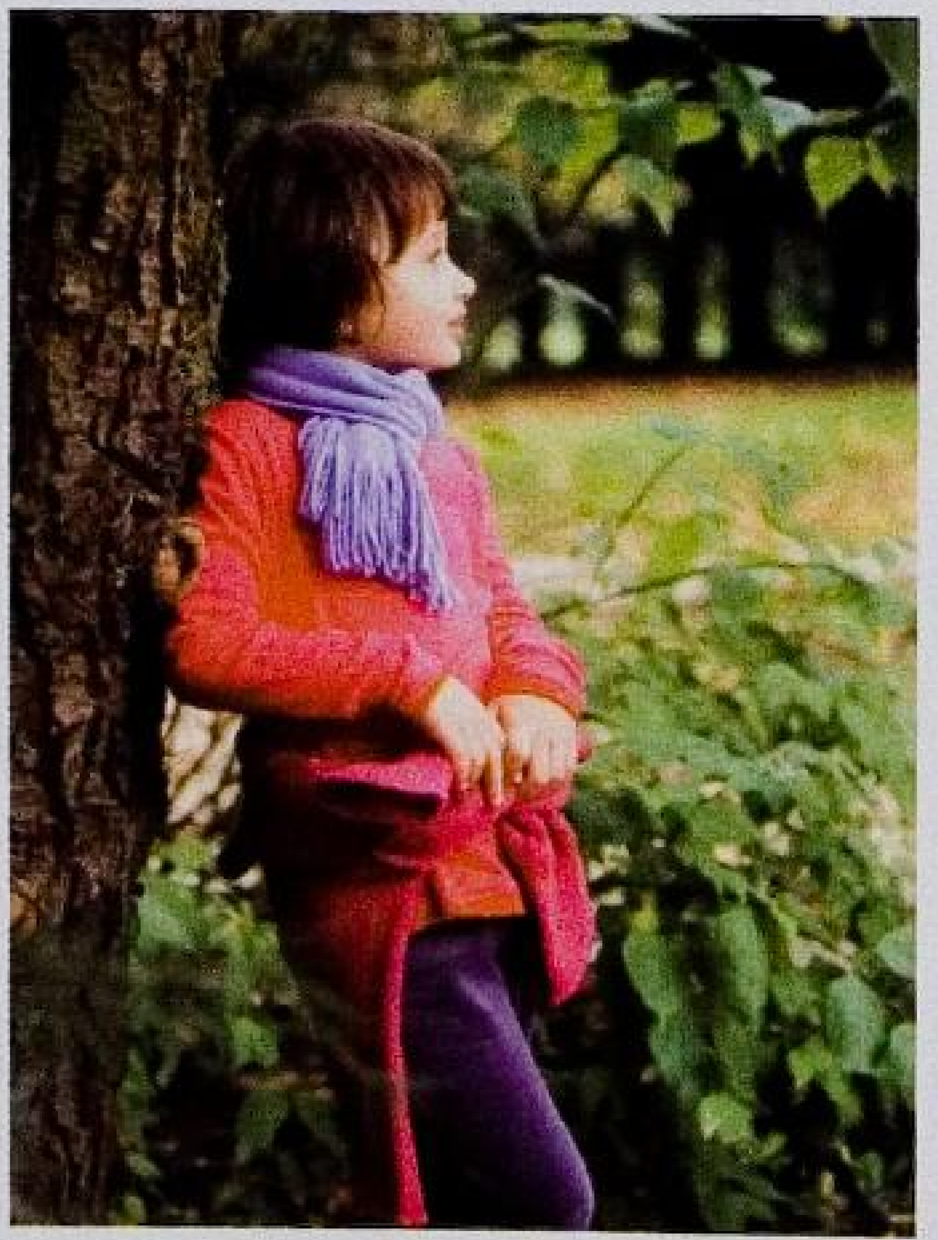
Fallen tree
A fallen tree makes a simple prop in a woodland environment, providing a natural element around which your subjects can pose.



Fall color
Fall colors make wonderful woodland portraits. Here, the subject is dressed appropriately for both the location and the time of year.



"First tree in the wood"
The foliage from above naturally subtracts light, with the result that the light appears to be coming from one side. The camera is positioned to give a 45° lighting pattern when the subject looks at the camera.



Flat lighting
Here, the subject has turned her face to look away; as a result, the light is flattened. To maintain a 45° lighting pattern on the face, you need to move the camera clockwise.

Most parks have a wooded area with dense foliage in summer and interestingly shaped trees in winter, when all the leaves have fallen. The changing colors of the scenery will naturally alter the mood of the portrait from season to season. We are lucky enough to have our own landscaped gardens to use as a backdrop, so we can shoot woodland scenes at any time of year with a certain control over the elements, but if you know your environment well, you can do exactly the same.

A simple rule to remember for lighting a subject with natural light in a woodland location is that of "the first tree in the wood." Simply place your subject underneath the canopy of the first tree on the edge of the wooded area, slightly in the shade; this will subtract much of the sunlight coming from above and hence give a lower direction to the light source. Be careful not to position your subject too far under the tree, as this will remove much of the front-directional light; the quality of light will also be severely degraded in contrast, and will take on a green hue from the tree. This magic formula will guarantee that the subject is lit and the background will be naturally darker through the fall-off of light. A reflector panel is a perfect accessory to enhance the face of the subject—especially if the he or she is positioned under heavily foliaged trees, which shade the face too much.

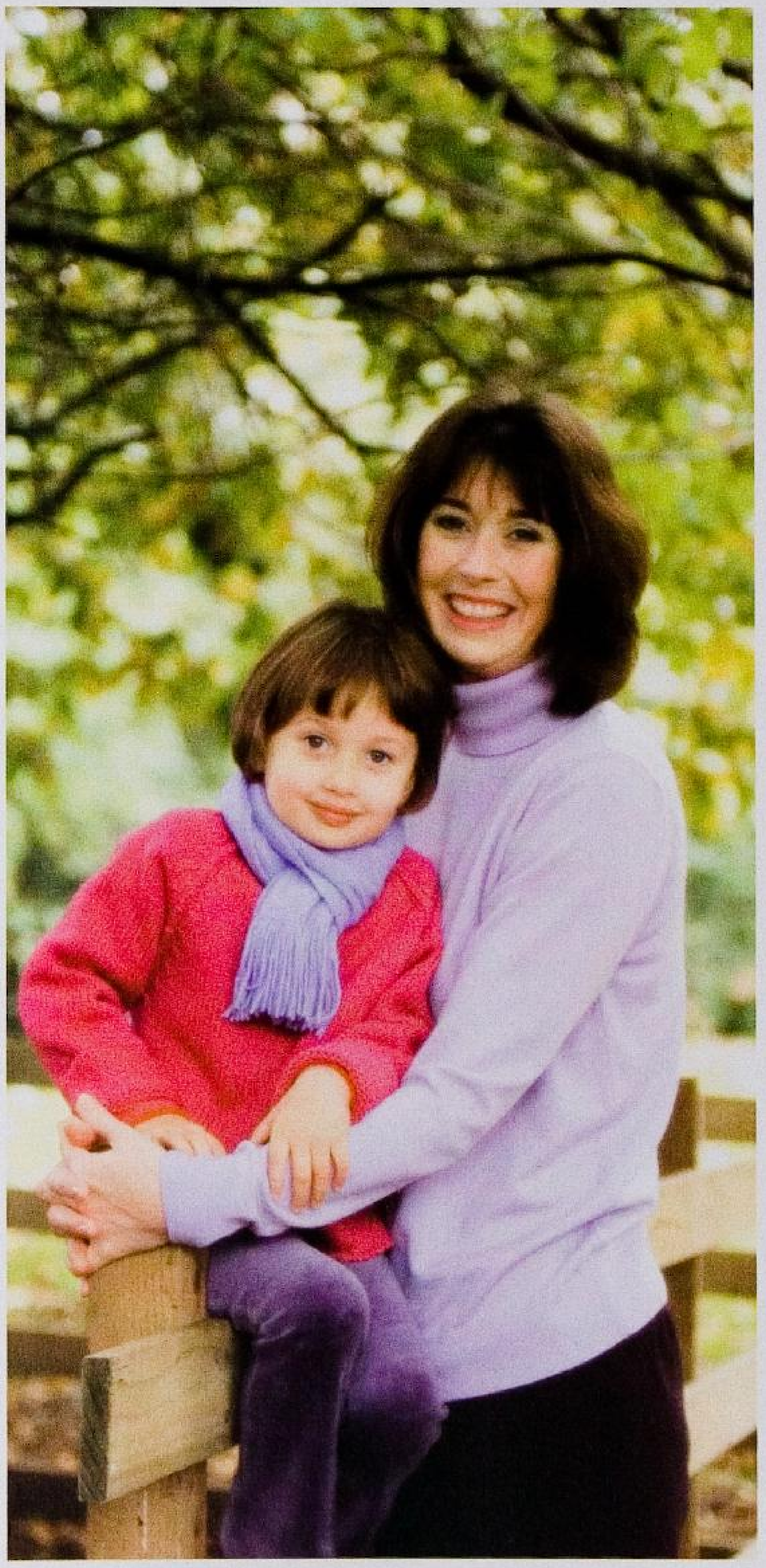
I very rarely use portable flash in a woodland setting, as it tends to draw attention to foliage—especially to any leaves that are between the camera and the subject. When I do use portable flash, it is usually on a stand at 45° to the subject, hidden in the trees but with no foliage between the flash and the subject. Make sure that the flash comes from the same direction as the natural light, and is set only half a stop above the ambient reading; this looks natural and does not to overlight the subject, making the surrounding area dark.

The seasons

Spring is a popular time of year for taking portraits in woodland, as the new plant life brings alive ground and trees, and there is usually an abundance of color that you can incorporate into your shots.

Summer is not as popular, mainly because

▲ **Natural setting**
This shot was taken through foliage to give a natural vignette and frame to the subjects. A bench is a perfect prop; people seem to sit naturally, and require very little guidance on how to pose.



▶ **Fencing**
With subjects of very different heights, as in this portrait of a mother and child, wooden fence posting gives a simple and effective prop that can be used at any time of year.

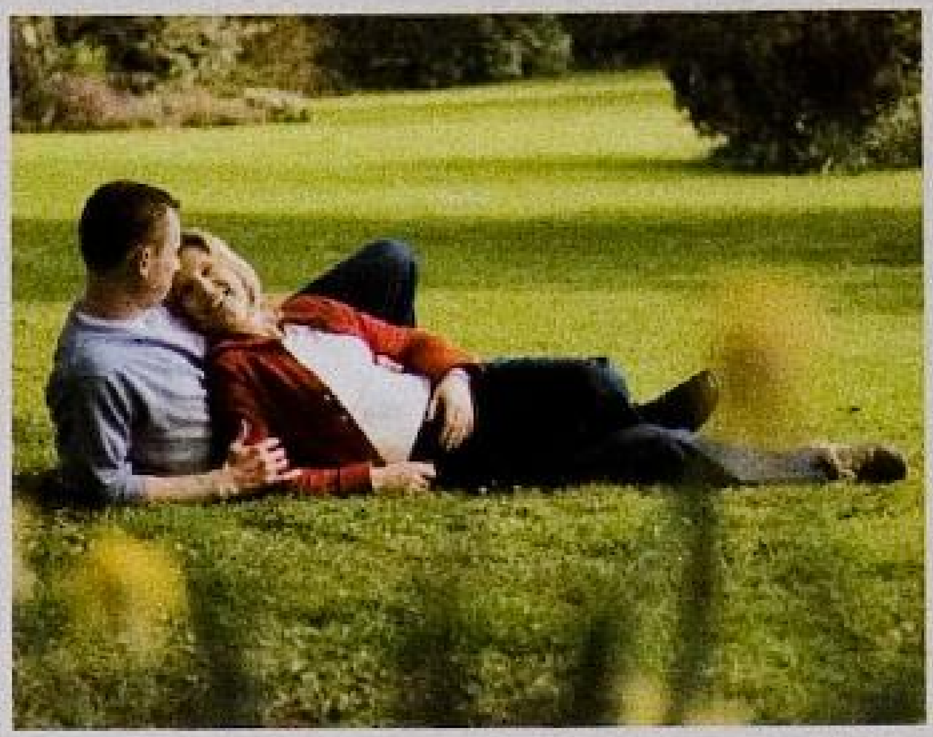
the sunlight is harsher and the foliage of the trees is very dense, which creates deep shadows and bright highlights.

Fall is the most popular season because of the fantastic leaf colors, both on the trees and on the ground. It is a fun time in our woodland sets, and brings out the child in many clients.

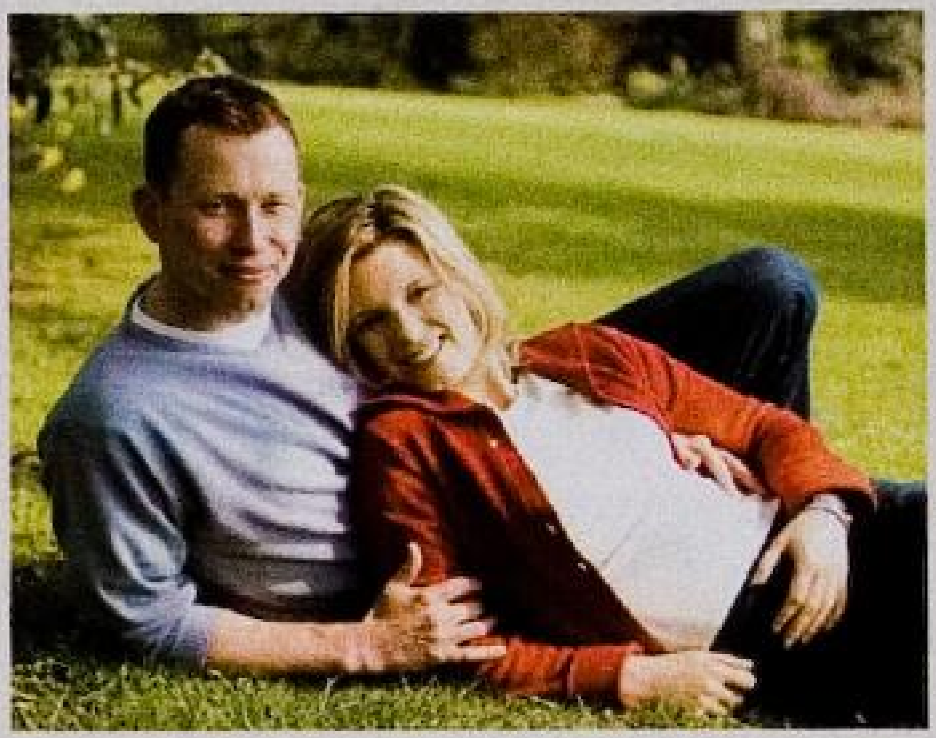
As a rule, the only woodland portraits that I shoot in winter are when we have snow; this provides an atmospheric backdrop for portraits.

Changing camera position and angle

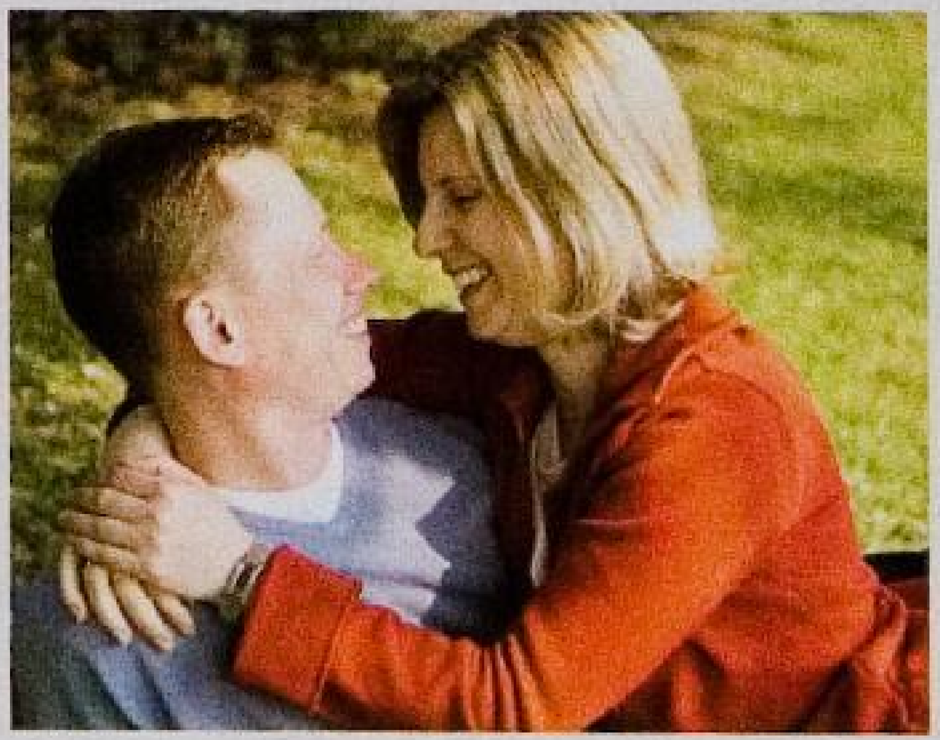
This series of images show how easy it is to get variety from one pose simply by changing your camera position and angle.



Full-length portrait
This shot was taken through foliage from a low camera angle to add to the romantic mood.



Three-quarter portrait
In this portrait, the camera was moved to shoot the couple from straight on, allowing the sunlight to create shadowing on their faces. The lighting pattern on the man was near the standard 45°; the woman was slightly split lit, with the shadow area being slightly filled by placing a reflector panel in front of the camera.



Close crop
In this portrait, the chins and body pose were raised. I moved the camera up to avoid looking up the subjects' noses.

The Home

The home is the most natural setting for a family portrait; it tells us more about the family, as well as being more personal to the family themselves. It also allows us to shoot with a minimum of equipment.

The family portrait
The family is posed around the father, with their bodies leaning toward him, making him the center of the group. The ambient room and window lights provided the basic exposure, and then a studio flash fitted with an umbrella was set to one stop higher to become the key light, as the natural light gave too many shadows on the faces.

Whenever I am shooting a portrait in a family home, I try to use as much natural window light as possible and then use the room lighting to enhance detail. Using window light gives a believable lighting quality to the portrait; the only real disadvantage is that you usually need to use slower shutter speeds in order to pick up the ambient light of the room.

Furniture

It is natural to use the furniture in a room as a prop, but it should not be allowed to dominate the image. I try to move the furniture as little as possible, as this changes the domestic setting that the family knows, but there are inevitably times when you need to move a piece of furniture to make use of the natural window light or for dramatic effect.

Reasons for choosing the family home as the location for a portrait:

Some good reasons:

- ✦ The family is surrounded by objects that have a personal significance for them.
- ✦ The children will naturally be at their most relaxed, because they are familiar with the surroundings.
- ✦ The colors of the room are the family's choice.
- ✦ You can use window light, so equipment is minimal.

Some bad reasons:

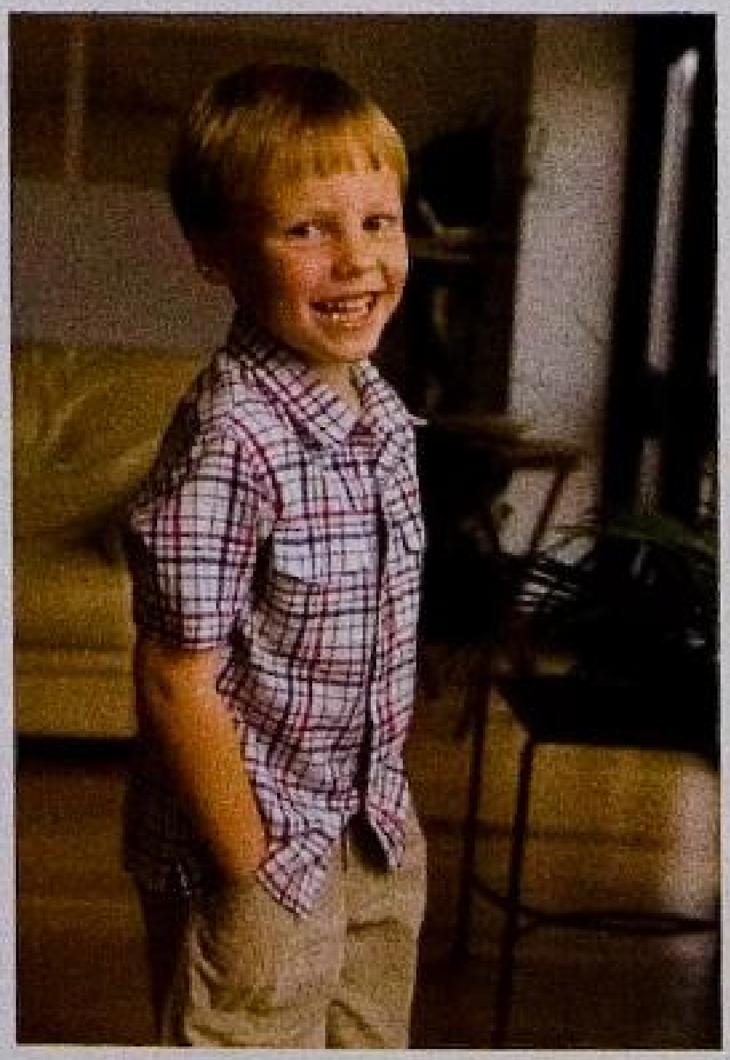
- ✦ Some houses are cluttered with possessions, which can distract from the portrait.
- ✦ The children will have a shorter attention span, because they are familiar with the surroundings.
- ✦ Some wall colors or wallpapers can distract.
- ✦ Space is usually limited.
- ✦ Light levels through the window will vary at different times of the day.

tips

- ✦ Use window light whenever possible.
- ✦ Switch on all room lighting to lift shadow detail and give warmth to the setting.
- ✦ Move furniture when necessary.
- ✦ Move objects and ornaments out of the way if the room looks very cluttered.
- ✦ Avoid slow shutter speeds.

Using flash with window light

Window and room lighting
Here, the boy is mainly lit by the large window to his right, with the overhead room lighting adding to the ambience. The direction and softness of the window light give a smooth transition from highlight to shadow, and reveal detail in the elements in the background.



Window light plus studio flash
To draw more attention to the boy, I positioned a studio flash next to the window so that the light from both sources came from the same direction. I fitted the flash with an umbrella to soften and spread the light, allowing it not only to illuminate the boy but also to add to the ambience. The camera was set to the same exposure as for the shot taken with just window light, with the flash set half a stop higher to increase the contrast and slightly darken the background.

▲ Distracting background
The background draws attention away from the child and the chair. A simple solution is to increase the amount of light on the child, making her brighter than the background; this can be done simply by increasing the studio flash setting. Another method is to overlight the background by decreasing the amount of light on the subject, by introducing a diffusion reflector panel between the subject and the window and switching off the portable studio flash.

◀ Minimizing the image
By moving the child and the chair to the opposite end of the room, I was able to simplify the image and give it more impact. The child is lit by the window to her left, the light slightly interrupted by a large television just out of shot. Because she is further away from the window than in the shot above, the overhead lighting is more evident, giving a much warmer color.

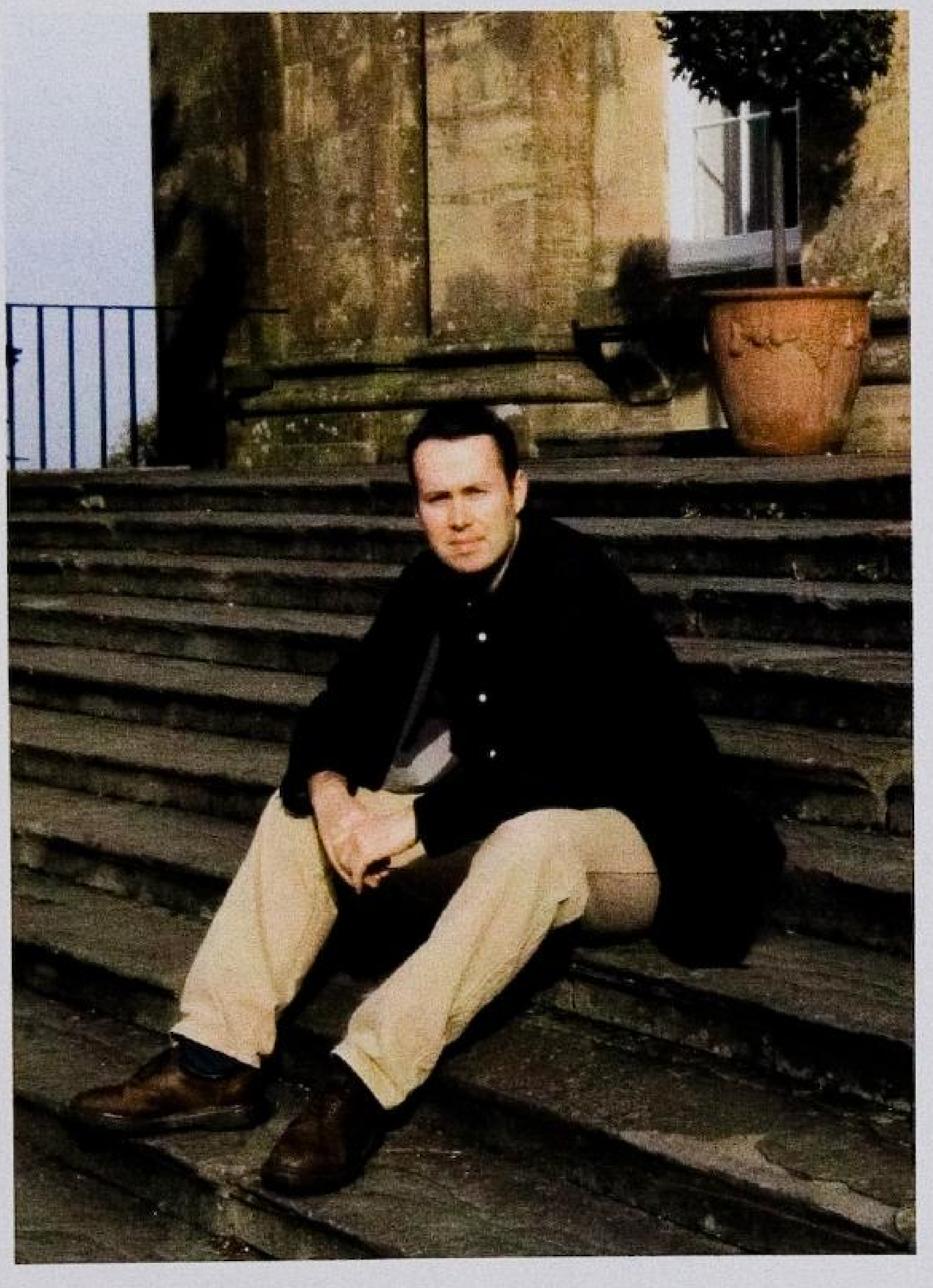
Using Architecture

Including buildings or architectural details in a portrait not only gives a creative backdrop to the image but also shows the scale of the subject. The lines and textures can also be used to enhance the composition.

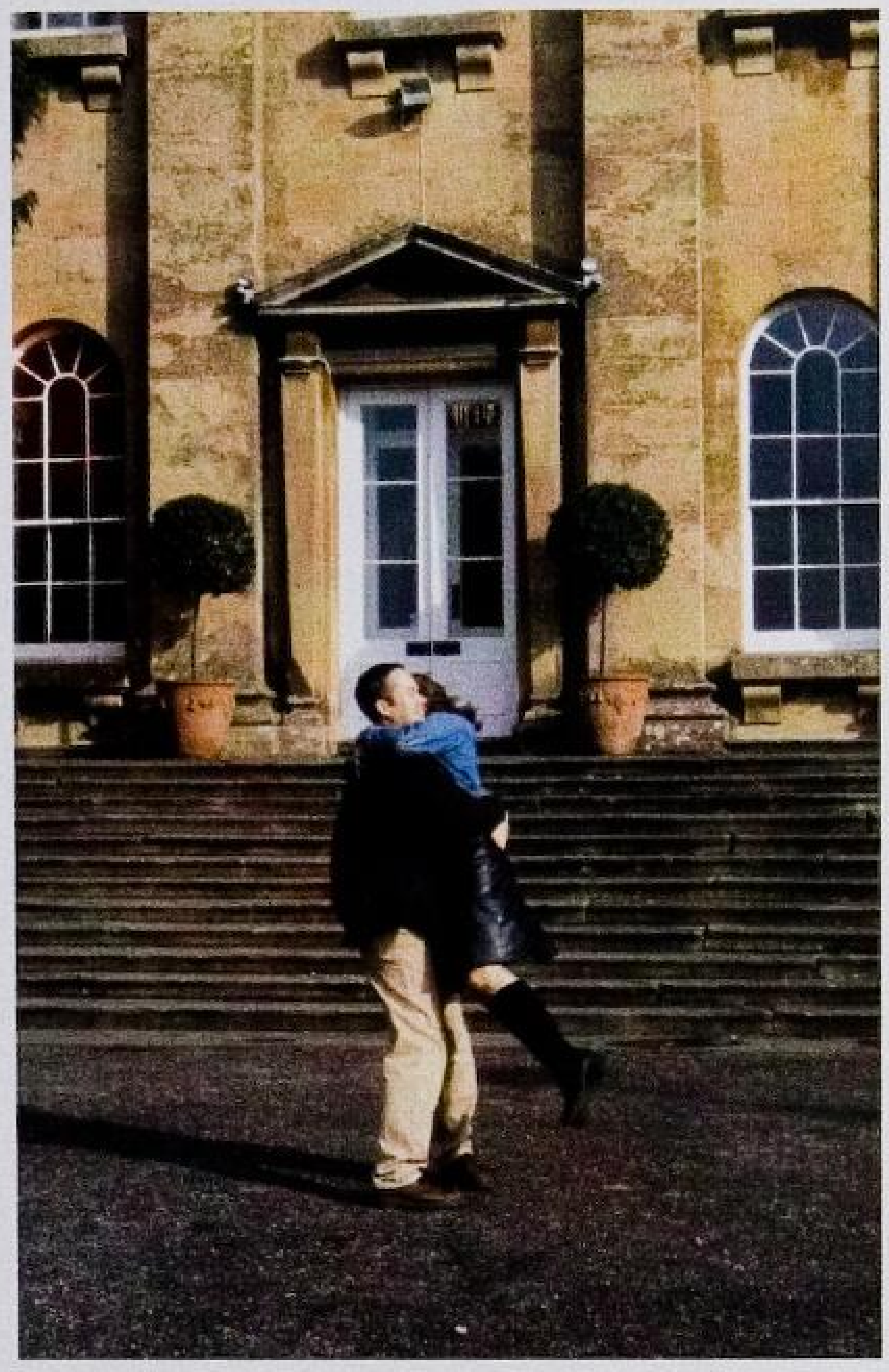
When choosing an architectural setting for an outdoor portrait, I always start by asking the clients for their ideas on where to shoot, so that the end result will have emotional ties. I can then give my creative input by bringing the elements together. Old stone, for example, has great texture and coloring, so I tend to shoot it from close up, with the subject simply dressed so as not to detract from the textures. Sculptures, both classical and modern, can be used as part of the foreground to frame the subject, included in the background to create a sense of the location, or even used as a prop against which the subjects can lean. An old barn is perfect as piece of background architecture; shoot the same building from closer quarters, with light streaming through the windows and door, and you have the setting for a romantic and timeless shot.

Large groups require locations that allow for a staggering of heights, in both standing and seated positions. Classical buildings and stately homes usually have sweeping staircases on their approach and this is perfect for posing, especially when combined with south-facing views for all-day lighting.

The location can make or break a portrait session. It should always have a special meaning for the subjects or add to the overall impact of the portrait. Always think about how your subjects should be dressed, so that they look appropriate to the setting ; if in doubt, keep the clothing simple.

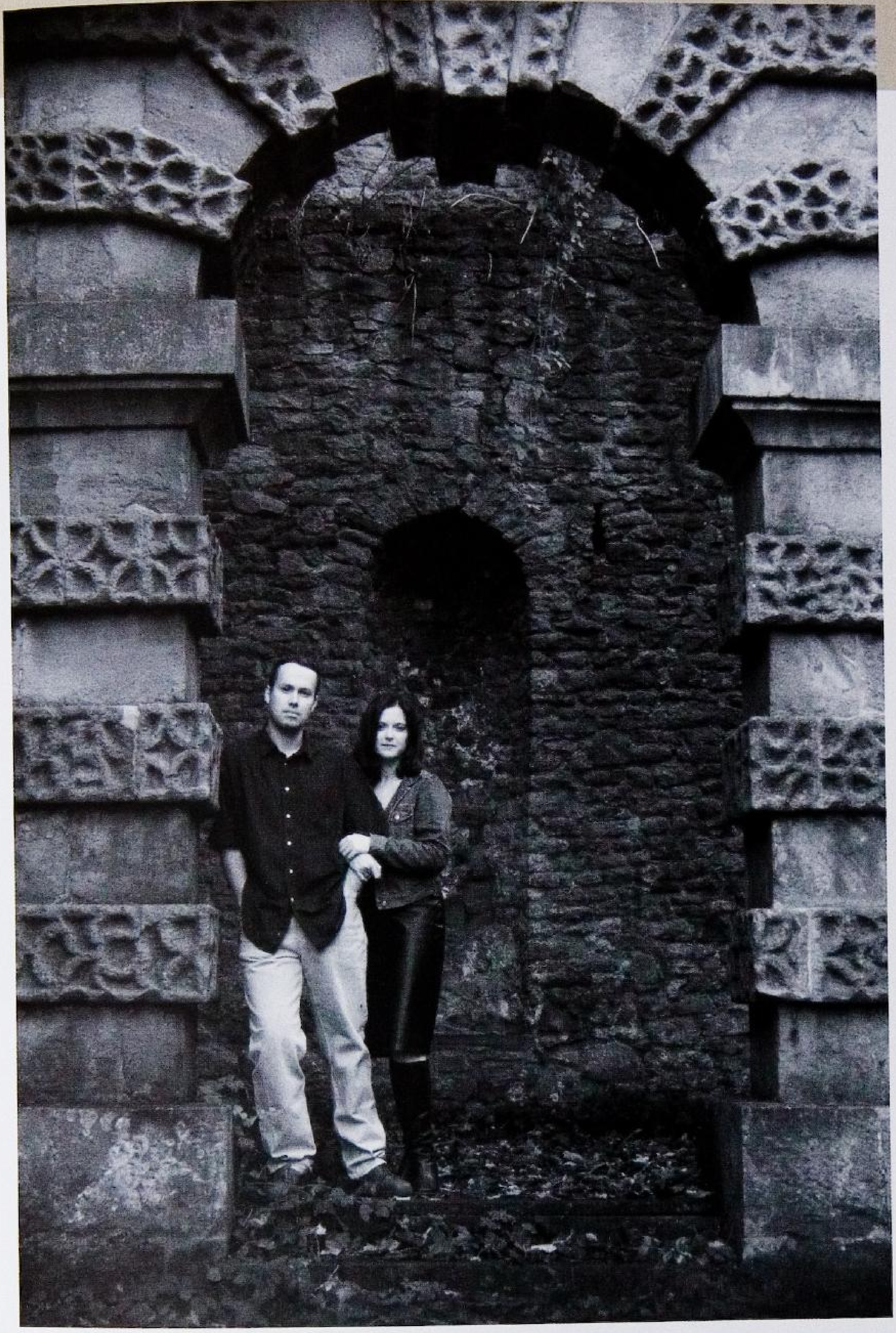


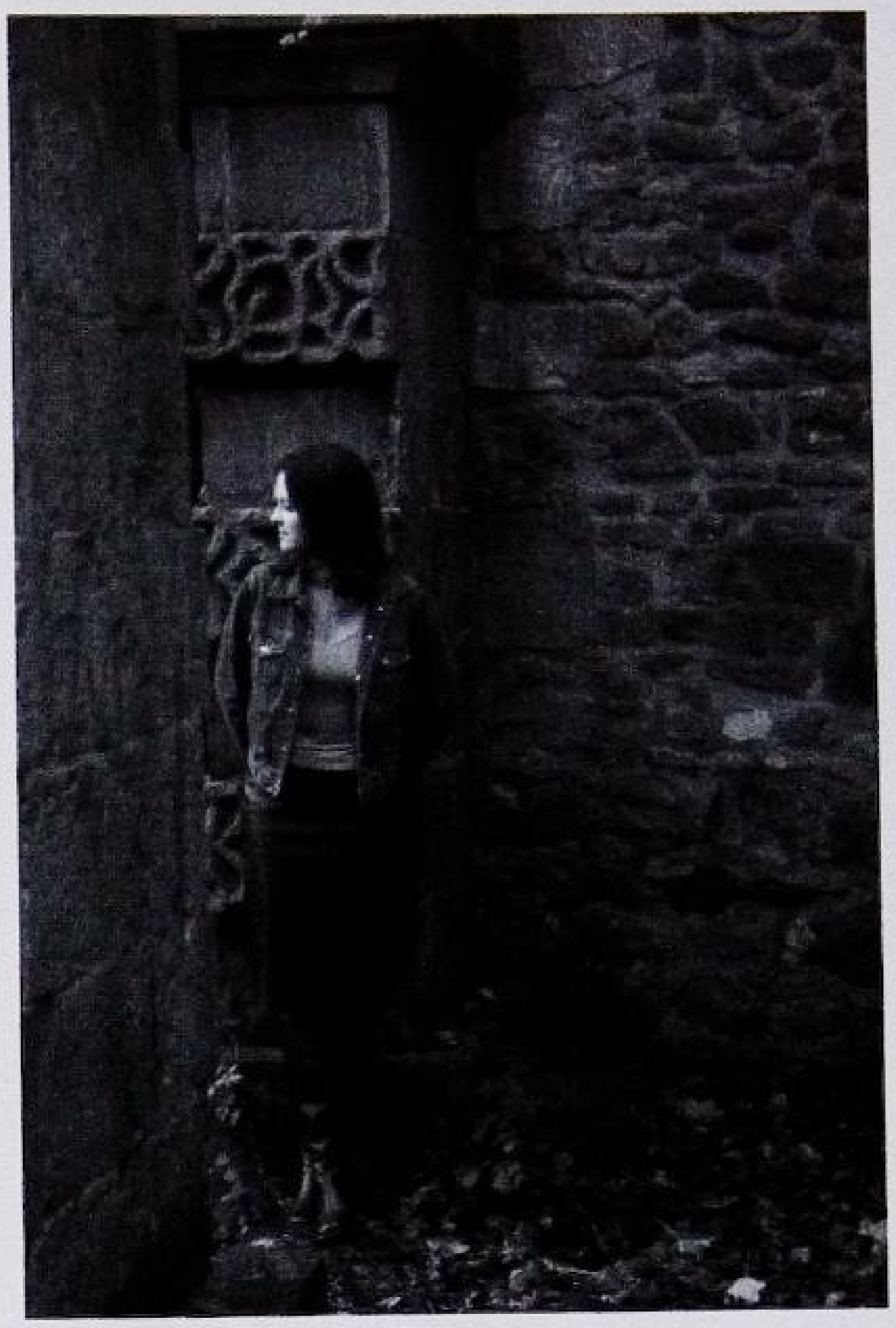
▲ **Steps and flat lighting**
Steps are a perfect prop for simple posing as most people will sit quite naturally and feel comfortable in the process. In this portrait the sunlight is coming from behind the camera, giving a flat lighting pattern, which also makes it difficult for the subject to look toward the camera.



▲ **The location**
This particular location was chosen by the subjects because of its emotional associations, as it was to be the location for their wedding reception.

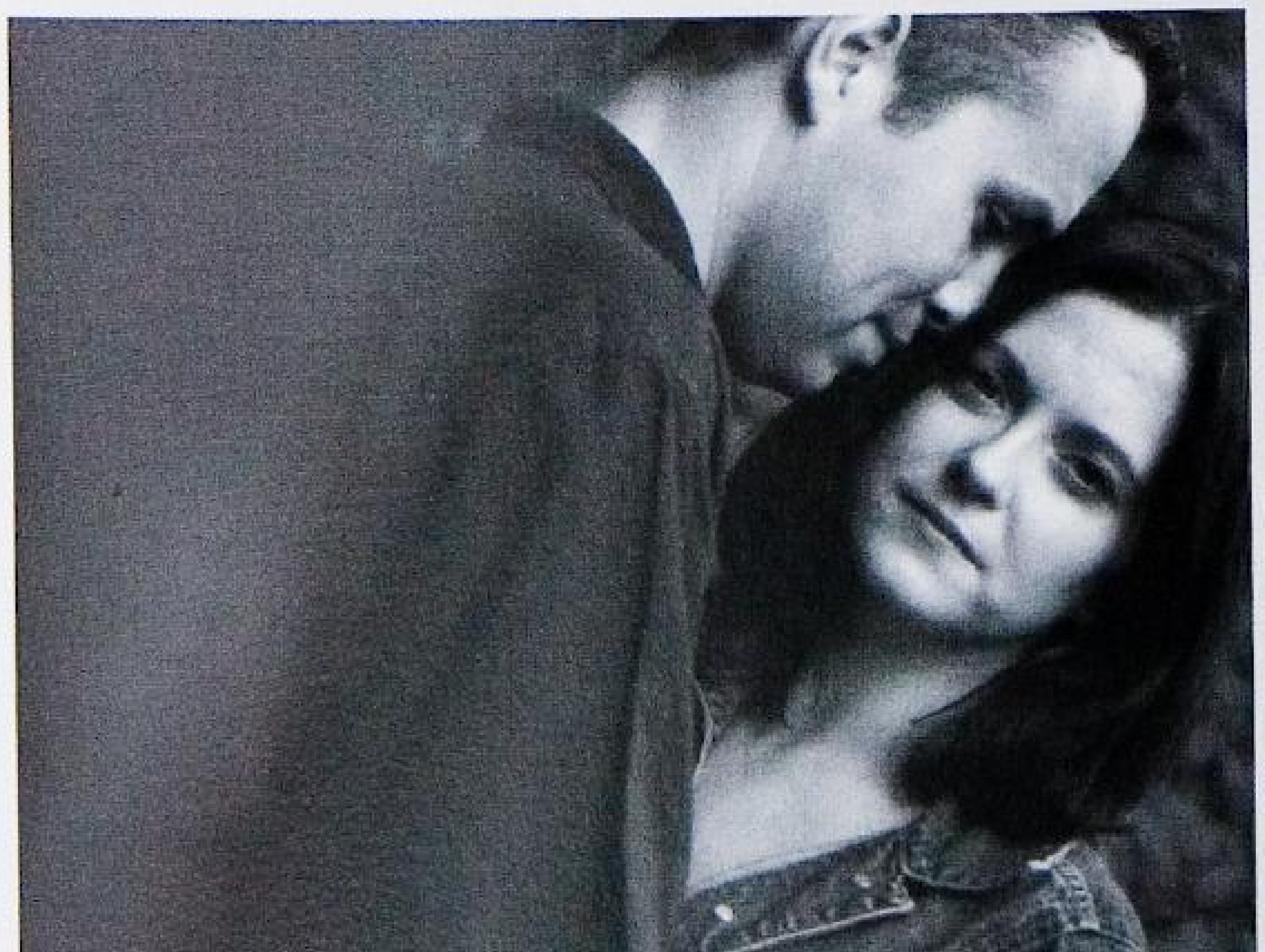
◀ **Framing**
I try to use parts of the building to frame the overall composition and the subject. Here, the camera was placed to frame the subject in the window behind; the foliage on the left of the frame balances the composition.





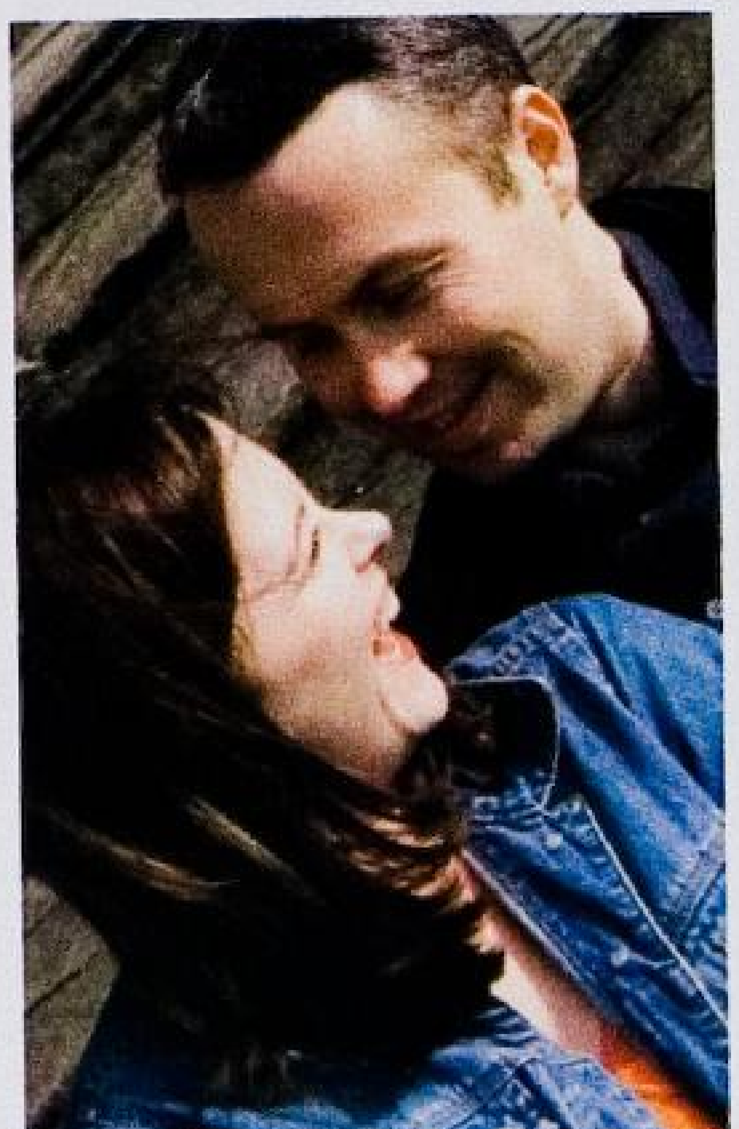
▲ Changing viewpoint
To create a stronger quality of light in this portrait, I positioned the subject in the doorway of the ruin looking toward the light. This gives a flat light on the face but gives the lighting source a direction. The wall on the left forms a natural vignette, as its shadow draws the eye toward the subject.

◀ The stage
Overgrown ruins are often dark, but this can add to the overall effect. This ruin is lit from an opening just above and by a corridor of light from an avenue of trees leading up to the location, giving a very flat light falling onto the front of the ruin and the subjects. The overall impact of the portrait is enhanced by the scale of the subjects compared to the size of the location—a compositional device that I use a lot.



◀ Split focus
In this portrait I am using an out-of-focus pillar to frame the subjects. Even though the light source is a little too high, it is soft enough to hold detail in the faces and make a successful portrait.

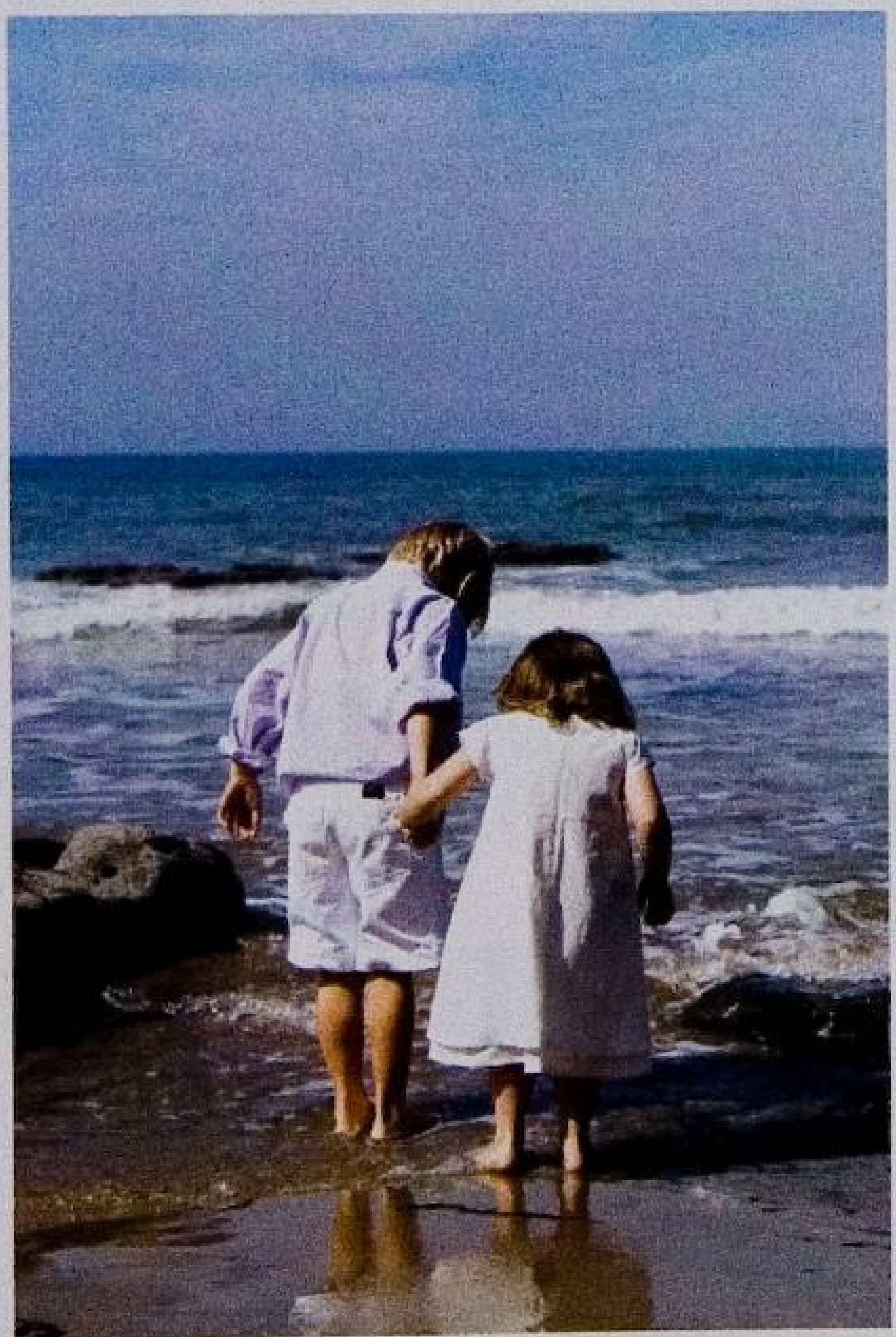
▶ Cropping
Even when working in dramatic locations the portrait selection should always include some tight crops; use elements such as steps to enhance the overall graphic impact of the image.



On the Beach

The beach brings out the child in everyone and is a perfect location to shoot portraits that are timeless in their appeal.

▲ **Tonality**
Sometimes a portrait just does not work as well as hoped. Here, the tonality of the children's clothing and the rocks is too similar; even though it is a nice picture, the portrait has no real contrast or point of interest.

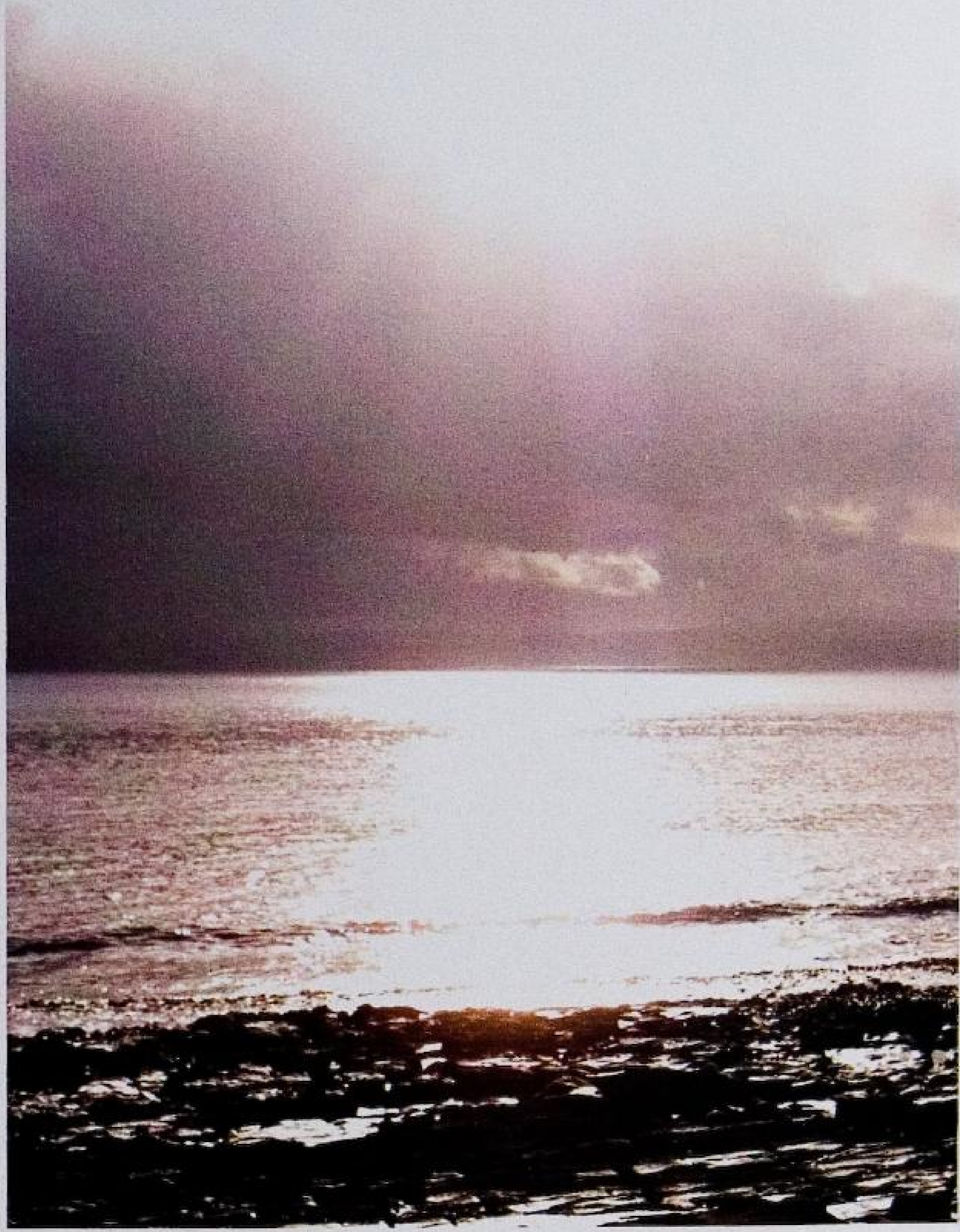


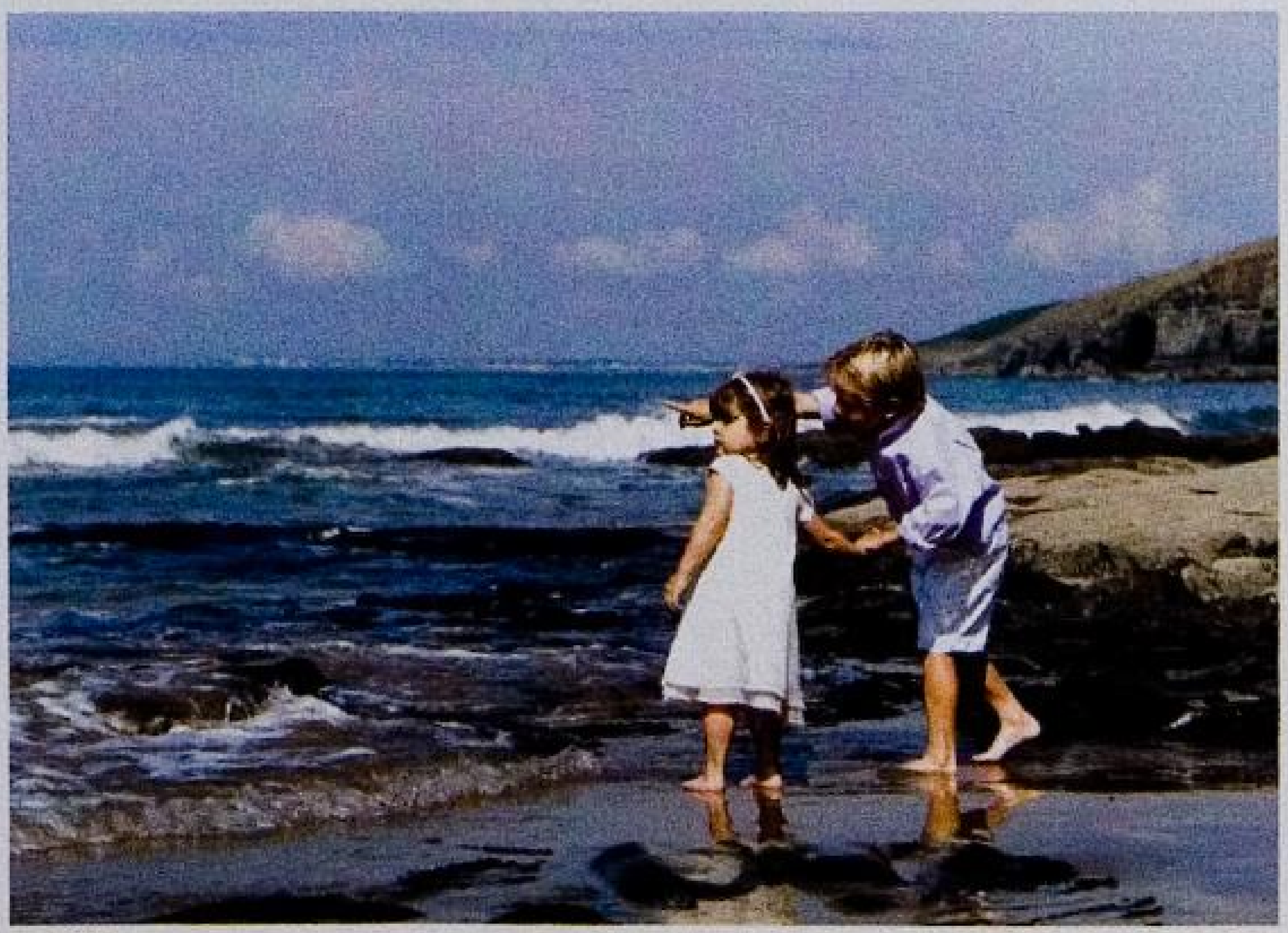
▲ **Timeless shot**
You do not always need to show the subjects' faces. I always include images of this sort in a session on the beach, as I feel they have a timeless quality.

Before you set off, decide what kind of portraits you are going to shoot. It is easy to get carried away with fun and playful images when photographing on the beach, as there is no better location to relax young and old clients. I usually start the session with more formal portraits and then allow the session to develop naturally into more timeless images, concentrating more on the atmosphere and the way the subjects interact with the landscape.

Think carefully about what time of day you are going to shoot. The beginning of the day will usually give a cold blue soft light, which can be very effective in portraiture—especially those images conveying a wintry mood.

If possible, avoid photographing on the beach in the middle of the day as the light is very harsh and your subjects may have to squint. A diffusion reflector panel is an ideal accessory for this time of day: use it to soften the light falling on the subject without losing too much of the yellow tonal quality of the sunlight. The stronger lighting conditions will give bluer and more saturated skies when the subjects are placed directly in the light; when the subjects are standing with their backs to the sun, metering to hold detail on their faces will result in the sky being overexposed.





◀ **Animation**
With the subjects fully lit by the sunlight, I could concentrate on getting the expression I wanted from the children by instructing the young boy to show his sister where to gaze. The space around the children is important not only in compositional terms, but also for creating a sense of scale.

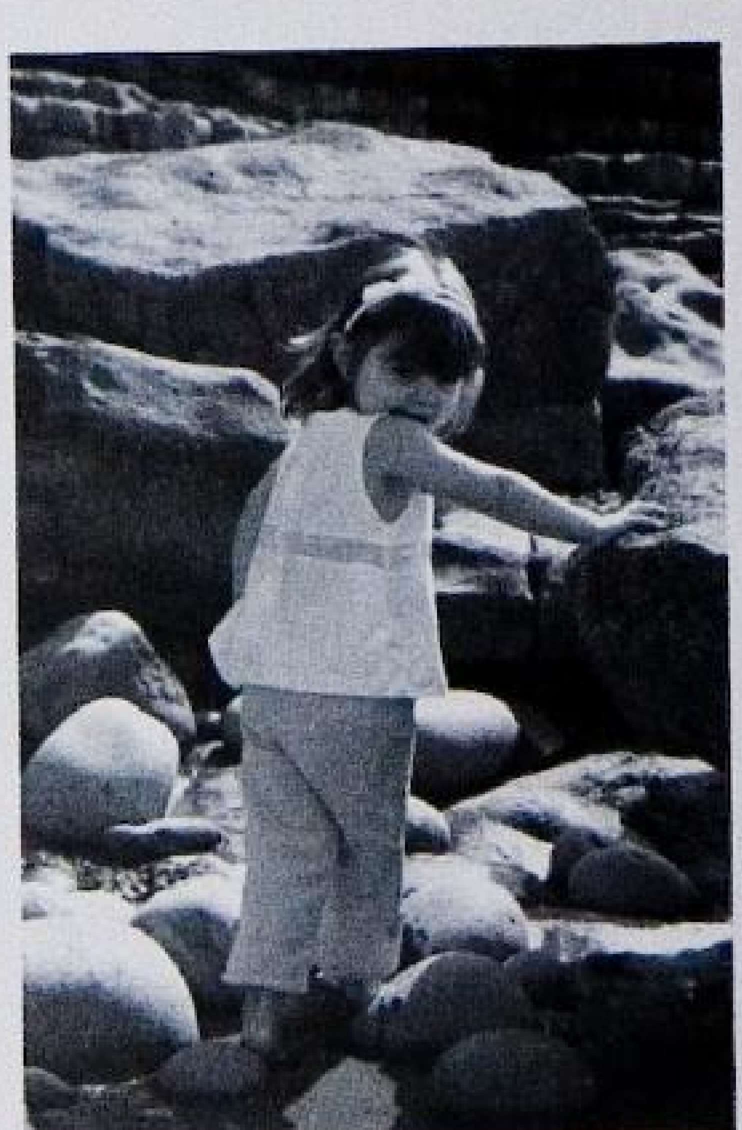
◀ Silhouette or not?
In this photograph I metered to allow for a little detail in the subject, so that the nude would not be fully silhouetted. By doing this I have intentionally lost some detail in the sky. Metering for the sky itself would have resulted in an equally dramatic, but very different, picture.

tips

- If the subjects are squinting or finding it hard to look at camera because of strong sunlight, get them to look away—preferably all toward the same point. Sunglasses can be used effectively in portraits in strong sunlight, but avoid shooting the whole session with them on.
- Check tide times before you go to the beach, as this may save you a long walk.
- Keep clothing simple, especially for groups. If you are working close to the water's edge, get the clients to remove their shoes.
- Take a blanket or a large piece of material to use as a screen when the clients are changing their clothes on the beach.
- A polarizing filter is a useful accessory—not only to increase the saturation of the color in the sky and landscape, but also to decrease the aperture setting in strong sunlight.
- Use a wide aperture and a long lens to throw the background out of focus and draw attention to the subjects.

The end of the day is my favorite time to shoot on the beach, as the light is soft and golden. If I need to increase the specularity on the subject, I use a reflector panel The overall warm tone in the portrait can be exaggerated even more in the last light before sunset. To capture dramatic skies at sunset in the portrait but still maintain some detail on the subjects, I position a portable flash just out of shot to illuminate them slightly, setting the flash one stop below the ambient light reading so that it does not dominate the portrait.

▲ Having fun
Bring out the fun element in beach shots; here, the children were running back and forth toward the camera. The key is to make it a game for them, rather than an ordeal.



◀ Relaxed portrait
In an informal portrait, you need to think about your choice of background and make sure it does not interrupt or dominate the image. Here I shot back toward the cliff face.

Glossary

Accent light: A light used to highlight and accentuate a specific part of the image.

Background light: The light used to illuminate the background and provide separation between the subject and the background.

Barn doors: Lighting accessories that can be clipped onto the front of a reflector dish and adjusted to control the spillage of the light.

Broad lighting: A lighting pattern in which, with the key light set up at 45° to the subject's nose, the subject turns his or her head slightly away from the key light, thus illuminating a broader area of the face. Broad lighting has the effect of making the subject's face look slightly fatter.

Butterfly lighting: A lighting pattern in which the key light is positioned above and in front of the subject, creating a butterfly-shaped shadow under the subject's nose.

Chisel lighting *see* Accent lighting

Fill light: A light used to illuminate the shadow areas in an image.

Gobo: A sheet of acetate into which patterns have been cut, rather like a stencil. Gobos can be attached to the front of a focusable spotlight and the pattern projected onto either the subject or the background.

Hair light: A light used to illuminate the hair, to enhance its sheen and prove a natural-looking separation between the subject and the background.

Honeycomb: A lighting attachment that controls the spread of the light.

Key: the overall tonality of an image.

High key: An image that is light in tone overall, with a clean background that is lighter than the subject.

Low key: An image that is dark in tone overall, with the highlights carefully controlled to draw attention to a specific area or areas, produced by using minimal lighting that provides just enough shadow detail to give depth and roundness.

Mid key: An image in which the overall tonality is a mid tone, with the only area of strong contrast being on the subject.

Key light: The main light in an image, which shapes the subject.

Narrow lighting: A lighting pattern in which, with the key light set up at 45° to the subject's nose, the subject turns his or her head toward the shoulder nearest the key light,so that the highlighted area occupies a smaller part of the image. Narrow lighting has the effect of making the subject's face look slightly thinner.

Reflector dish: One of two main types of lighting accessory that can be attached to a light or flash. A parabolic (or soft-light) reflector has a broad dish and spreads the light softly and evenly; a key-light reflector dish is smaller and produces harsher shadows.

Reflector panel: A lighting accessory made of translucent material, available in a number of different colors for different effects. Reflectors are usually used to reflect light onto the subject and improve detail in the shadow areas; black reflector panels are used to subtract light and create modeling.

Ring flash: A round flash unit with a hole in the center, behind which the camera lens in mounted. It produces virtually no shadow.

Snoot: A lighting accessory that concentrates the beam of light in a tight beam.

Soft box: A lighting accessory, available in a range of shapes and sizes, that is covered in layers of translucent diffusion material and is designed to diffuse and spread light from a hard light source, such as a flash, thereby softening it. On most soft boxes, you can remove one or more of the layers of diffusion material, which enables you to adjust the amount of diffusion.

Split lighting: A lighting pattern in which one side of the subject is brightly illuminated while the other is in deep shade.

Spotlight: A focusable lighting accessory that produces a tight beam of light, similar to a theater spotlight.

Umbrella: An umbrella-shaped lighting accessory designed to diffuse and reflect light back from the flash and onto the subject. The quality of the light depends on the internal finish.

Suppliers

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